VISIT…

Robert Lindmaier

Funky Fingers

Record included

Voggenreiter

Funky Fingers

by Robert Lindmaier

Voggenreiter

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Foreword

Let's be honest. Seeing the way that the thumb of Mark King (Level 42) races across those four strings that really mean so much to us is enough for anyone to catch his breath.

Anyway, that's what I felt like when I heard him for the first time.

Although the bass guitarist had already stepped out of his shadow existence as an accompanying musician into the limelight of the front half of the stage by the mid-seventies and musicians like Jack Bruce or Chris Squire, not to mention Stanley Clarke, were by then stealing the show from many a solo instrumentalist, no other bass style has revolutionized playing techniques in a way comparable to "pop and slap".

This technique originated from "black" American funk. Bass guitarists like Louis Johnson were among the first to follow Larry Graham in setting standards of hitherto unheard-of perfection, and they formed the actual sound.

Soon, however, "pop and slap" had continued its triumphal march through virtually all the up-to-date charts, and nowadays quite a few Continental bass guitarists are producing new sounds involving their own interpretations.

In this book I'd like to give you some advice and instructions that should help you to learn the style from scratch, and there are also some popular music examples that ought to enable you to consolidate your abilities.

I hope you'll have a lot of fun playing.

Robert Lindmaier

Funky

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A few preliminary notes...

1. In order to maintain a clear presentation of notes and tabs, I have:

   a) only marked the notes that are supposed to be popped ("P" like "Pop"), all notes and numbers that are not marked are supposed to be played with the thumb.

   b) omitted superfluous slur marks in the tabs, and whenever necessary, I have used dotted numbers.

   c) often drawn dots below or above a note (number). No matter what rhythm value they may have, they are played as short as possible.

   There are further keys to symbols in the respective chapters.

2. For reasons of playing techniques, it is better to maintain the same position of the instrument when you are sitting and standing.

   So fasten your strap and get going.

3. Just in case you do not have a metronome yet, I would strongly advise you to get hold of one. It will certainly help you, and it is also a good means of controlling you playing.

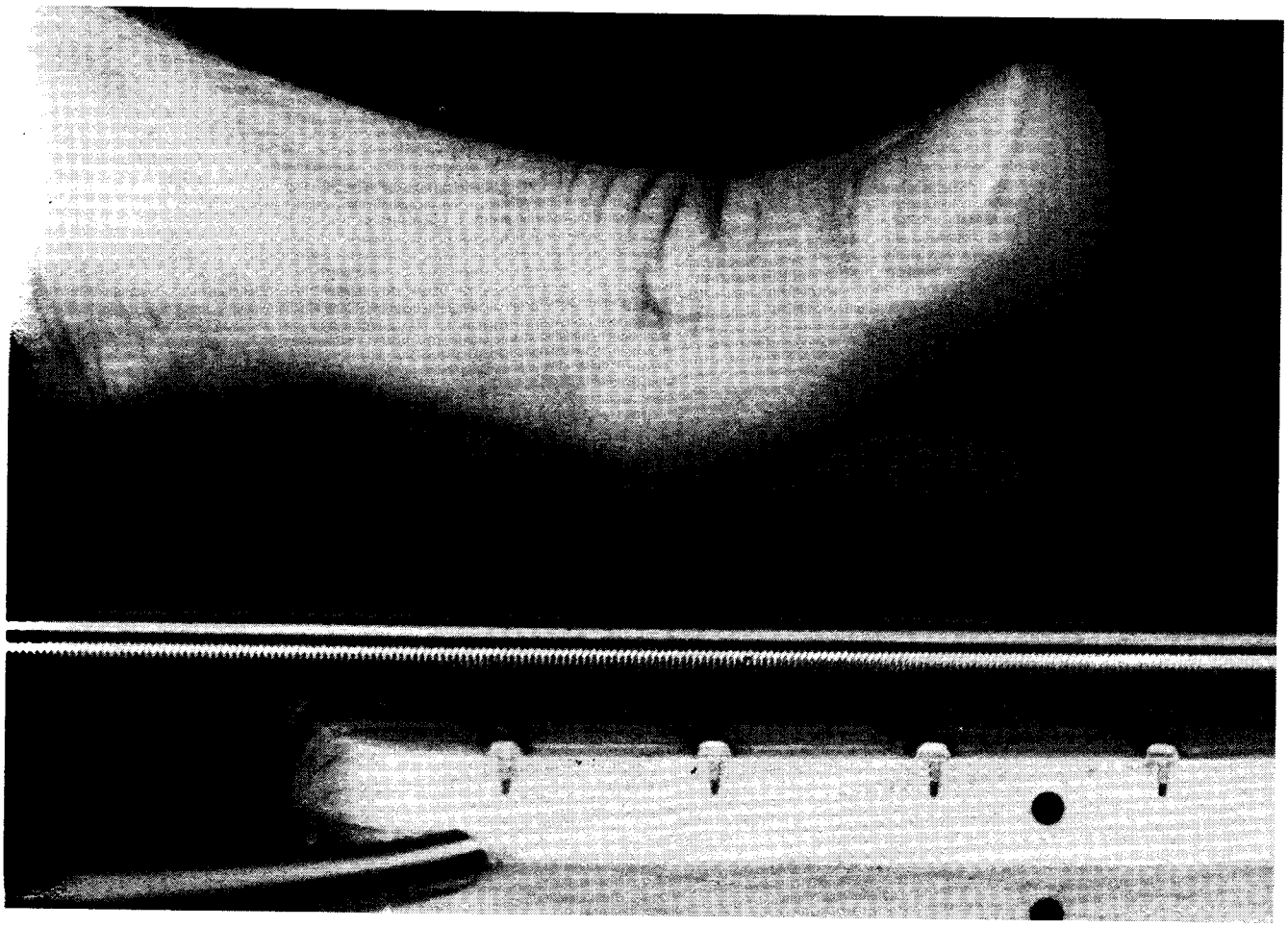
   In order to train your timing, you can also practise the licks contained in this book at an extremely slowed-down tempo. This will make maintaining the correct timing much more difficult, but it is certainly worthwhile.

The technique / Part 1

You will certainly already have noticed that the "pop and slap" technique involves hitting the strings with the thumb, and plucking them with the index or middle finger. First things first, though. We'll start with the thumb.

The "slap" technique

So stretch your thumb, bending back the last joint as far as possible so that the knuckle protrudes.

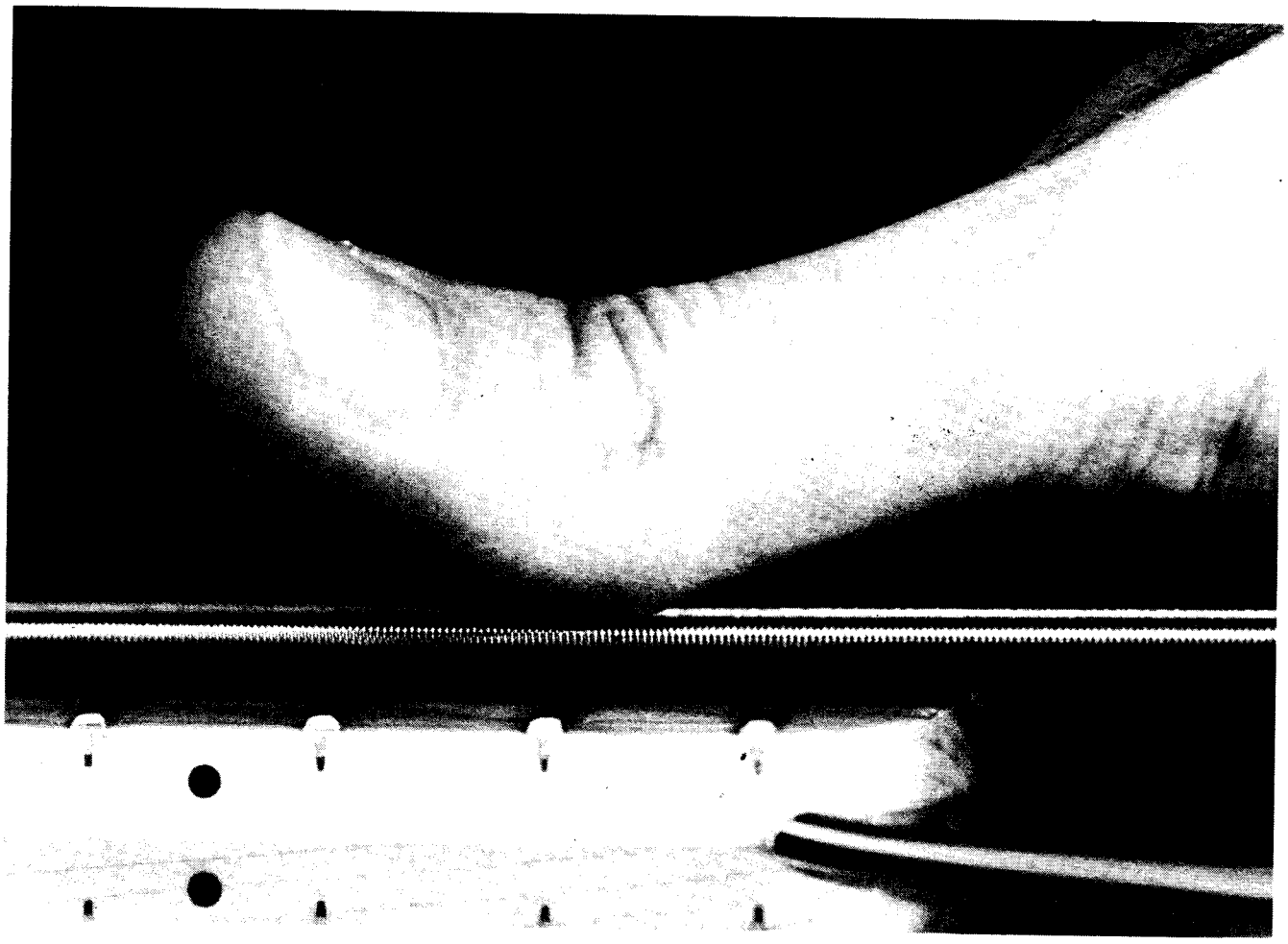


And this really is the crucial point:

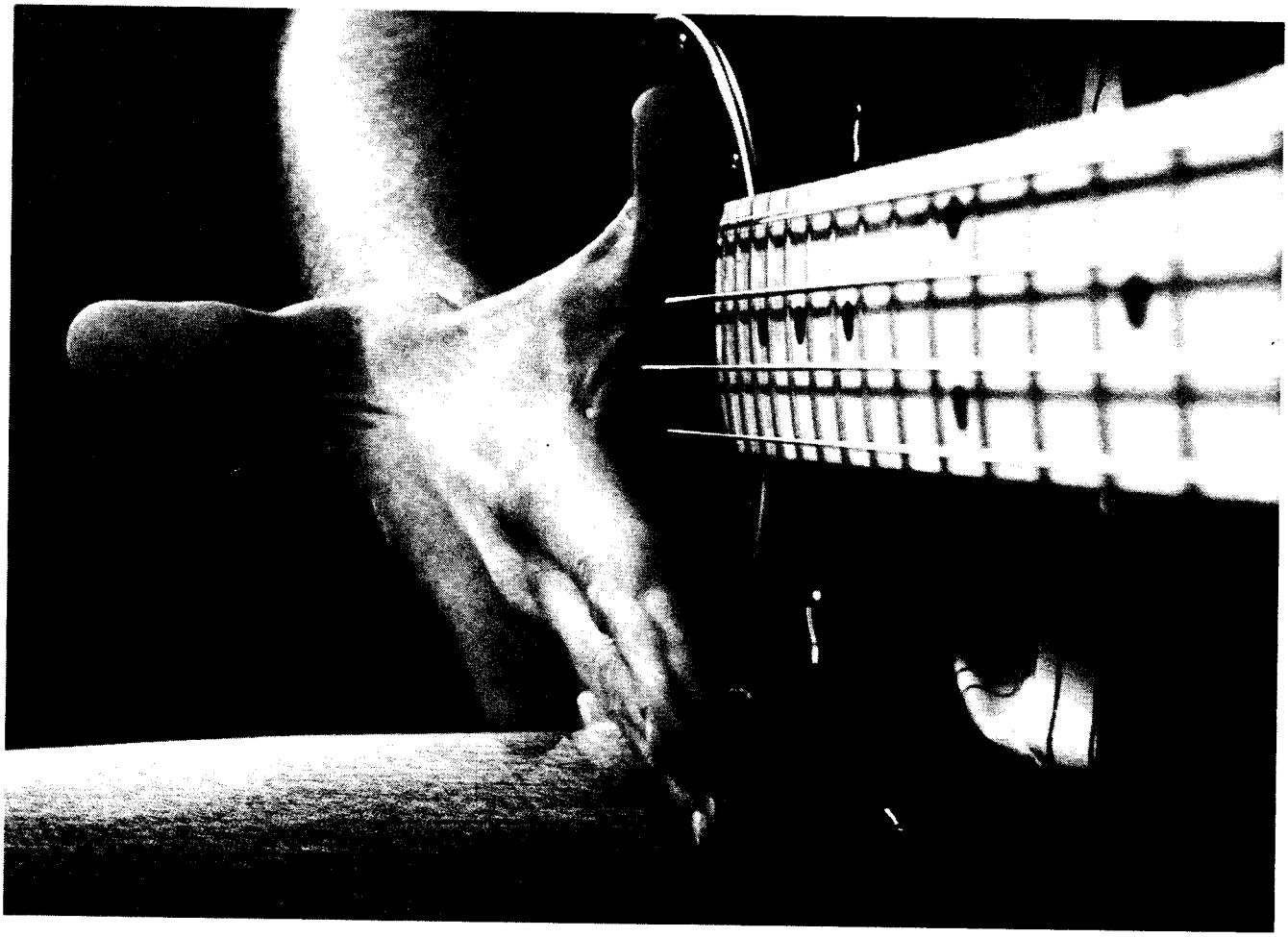
The string must really be struck solely by this knuckle. The thumb will then virtually jump back to its original position of its own accord.

The string is struck on the level of the last fret, so that, having been slapped, it beats against the fret. This is the only way to produce the typical, brilliant sound.

In the initial phase, this playing technique can be a little painful, but after a short time, a patch of horn skin will have developed on the knuckle.



The movement is created by turning the wrist. Your arm does not move, but instead, it is best to rest it lightly on the corpus of the guitar.

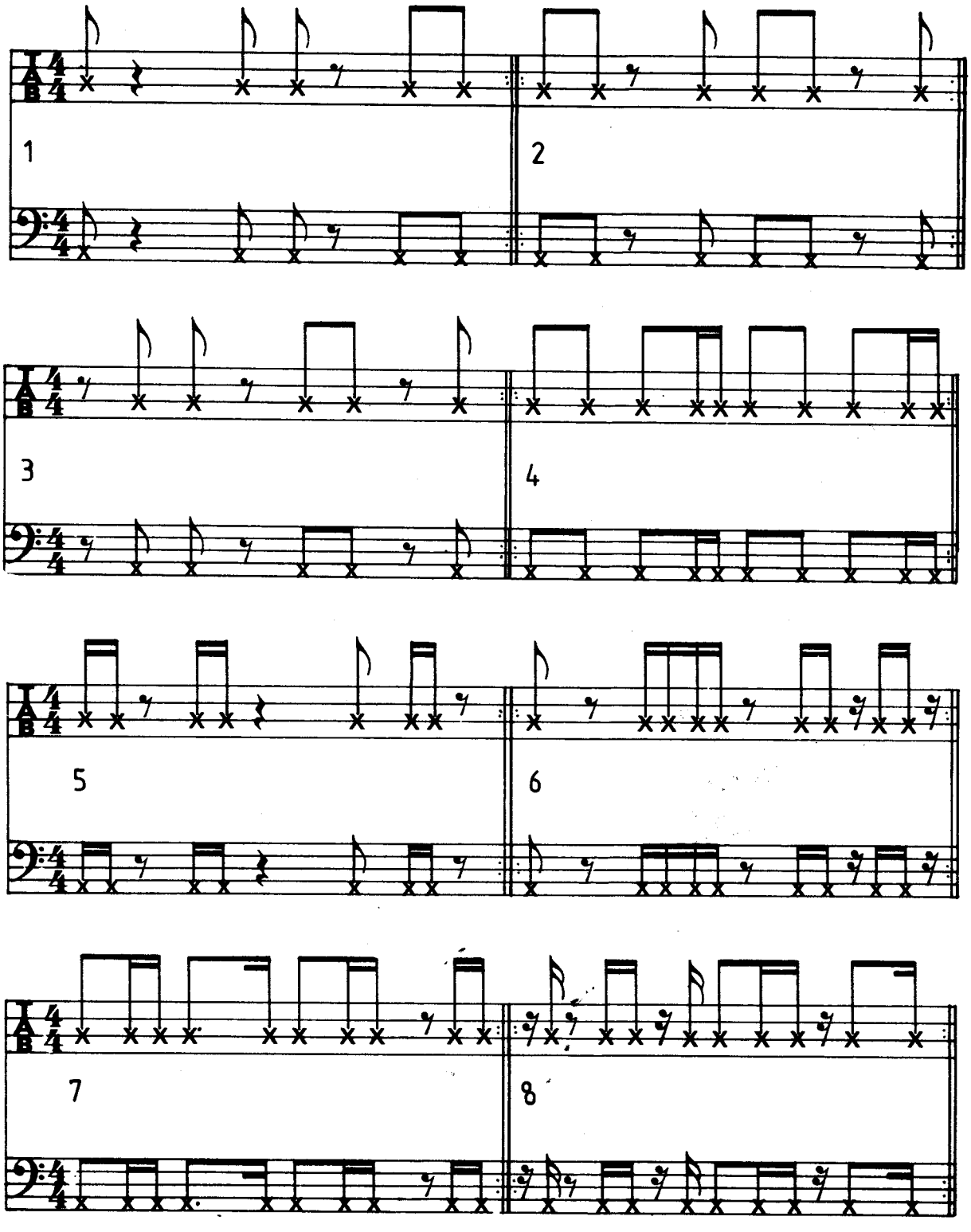


One more piece of advice: The higher you have slung your instrument, the less you have to bend your wrist in order to attain the correct strumming position. You will then quickly notice that your movements are achived with much less effort. And the hand that holds down the notes will also adopt a more level position, which in turn will certainly result in more fluent playing.

First of all a few ***target exercises***

Place the fingers you hold the notes down with loosely across the strings so that they can't vibrate. Then you can play simple rhythmic figures like the following, employing the "slap" technique on all strings.

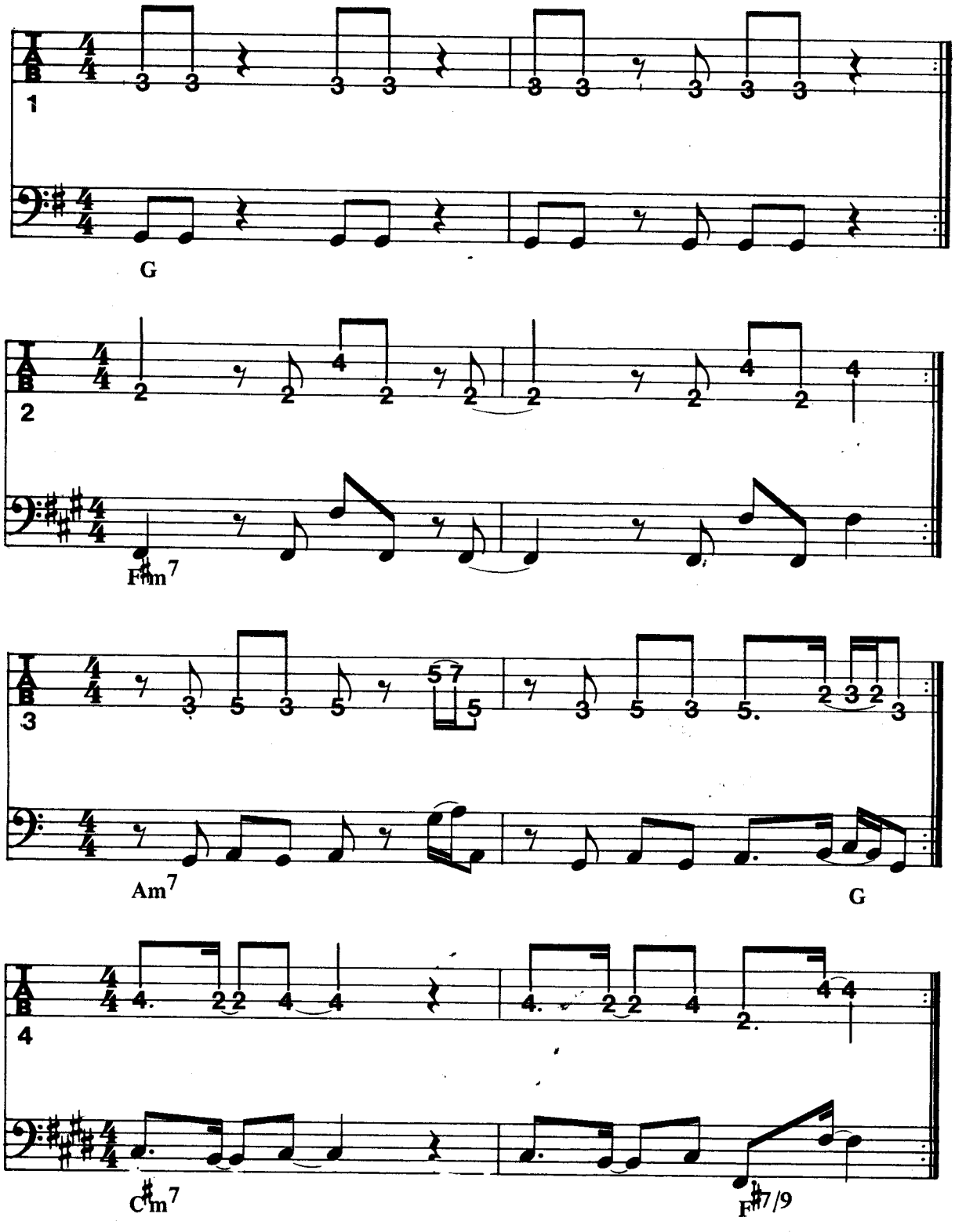
Take 1

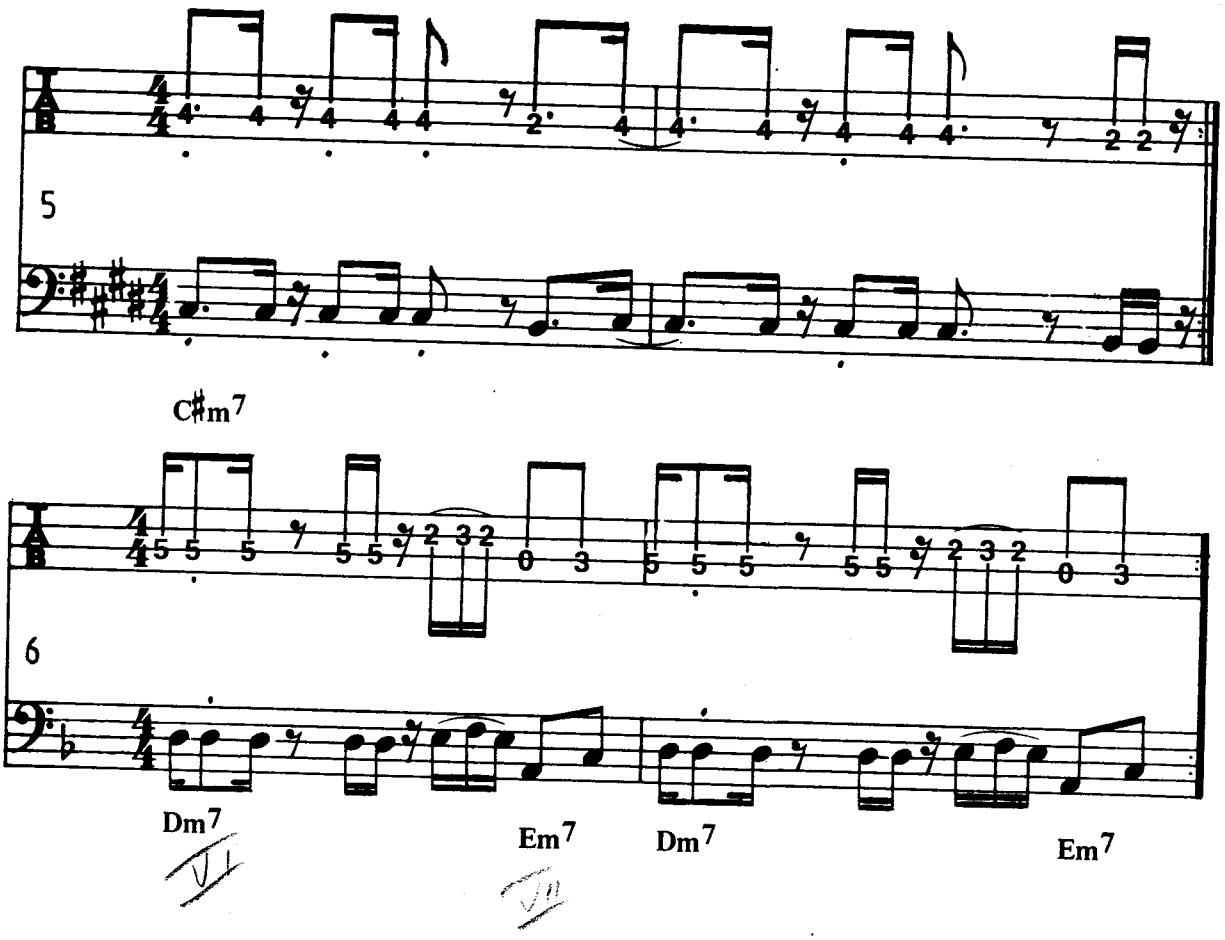


Easy Slap Licks

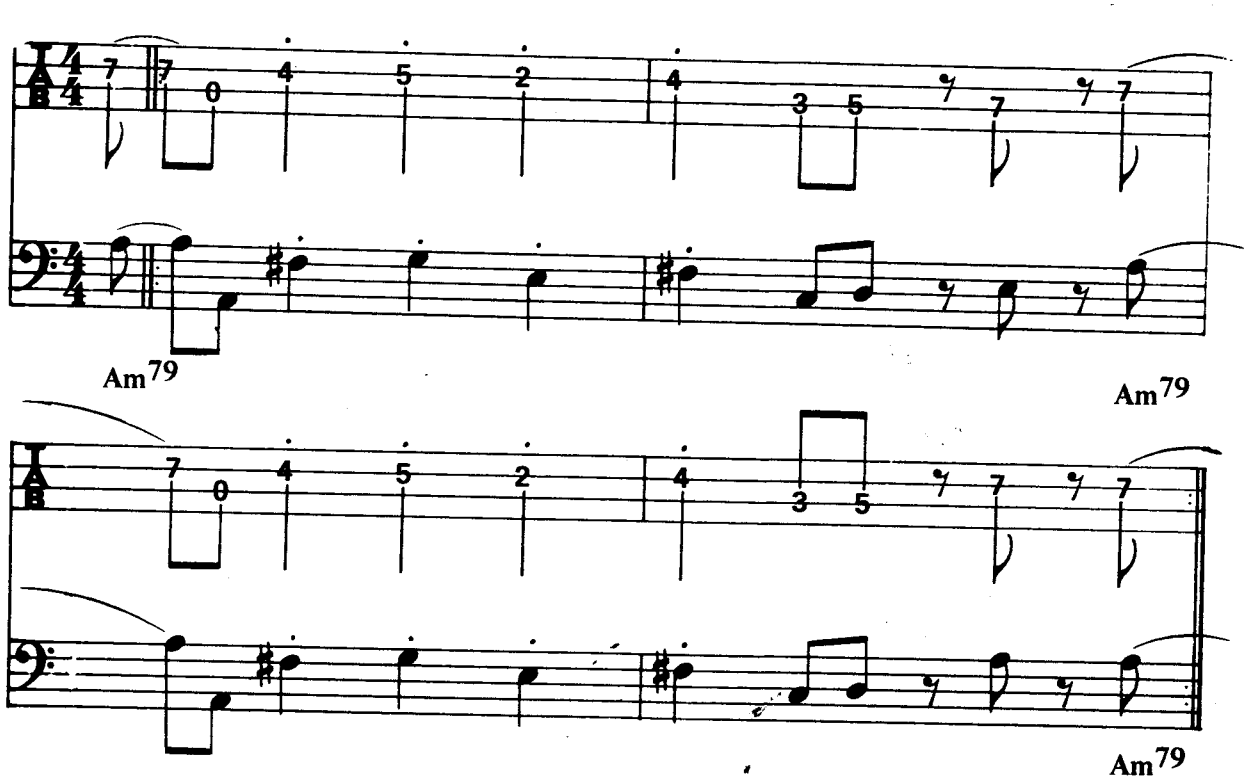
Now start the follwing licks slowly, and then increase the tempo, but take care not to accelerate during an exercise.

Take 2 (♩ = 90)

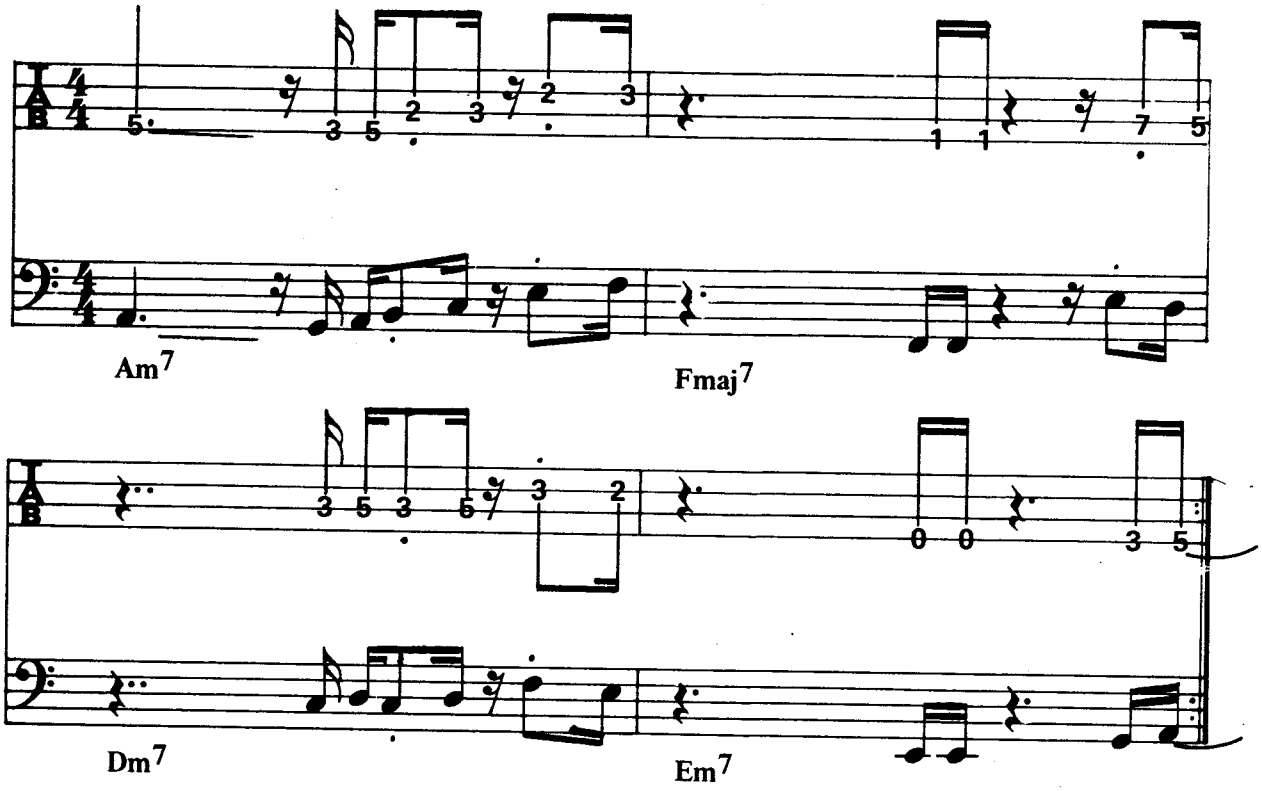




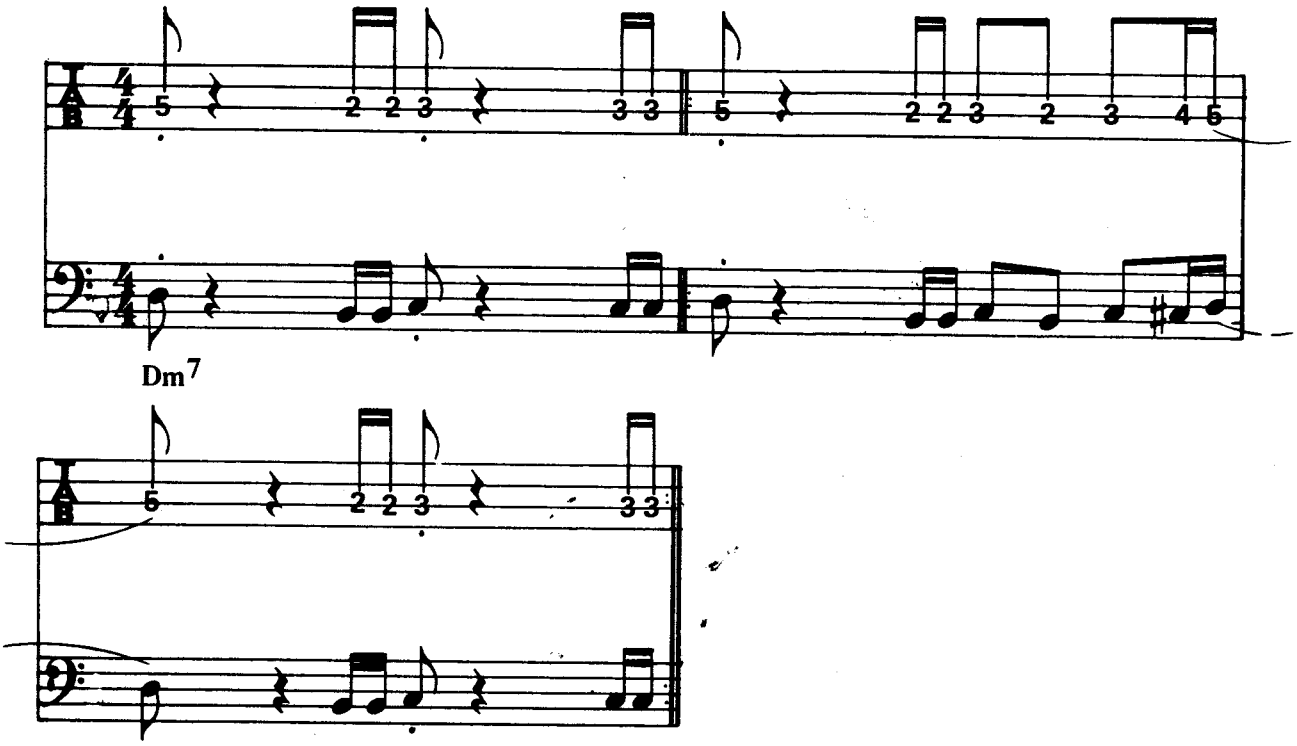
Take 3 (♩ = 160)



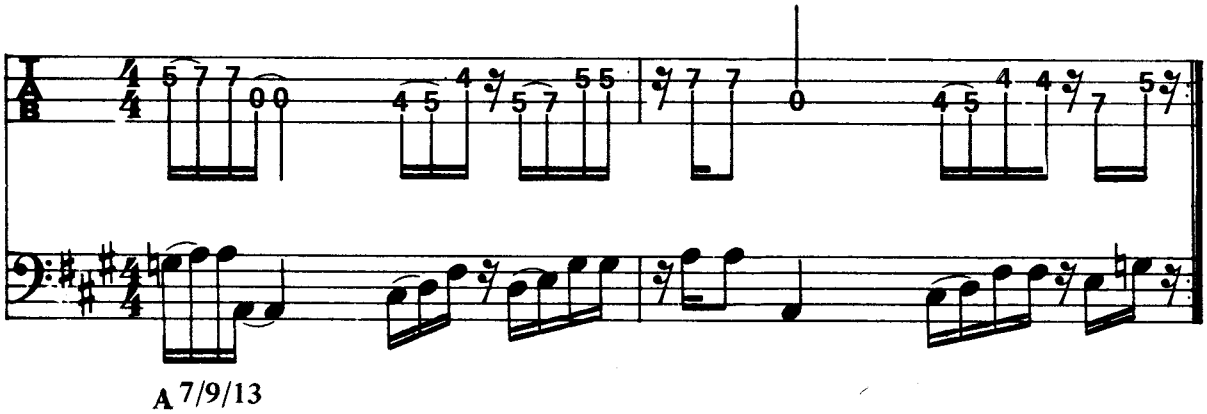
Take 4 (♩ = 96)



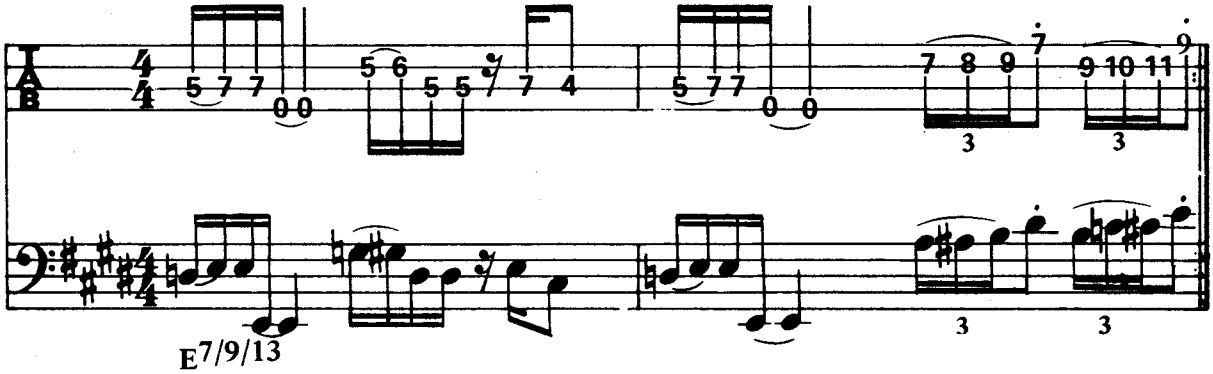
Take 5 (♩ = 120)



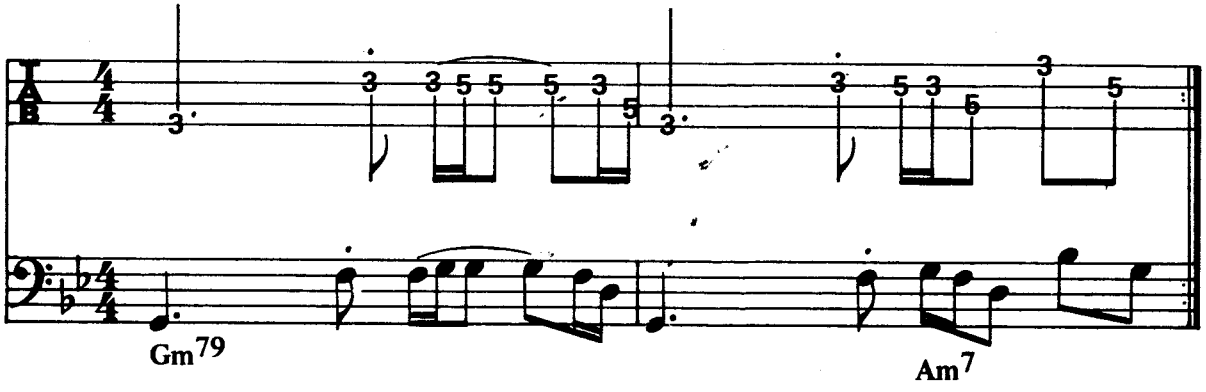
Take 6 (♩ = 88)



Take 7 (♩ = 96)



Take 8 (♩ = 120)



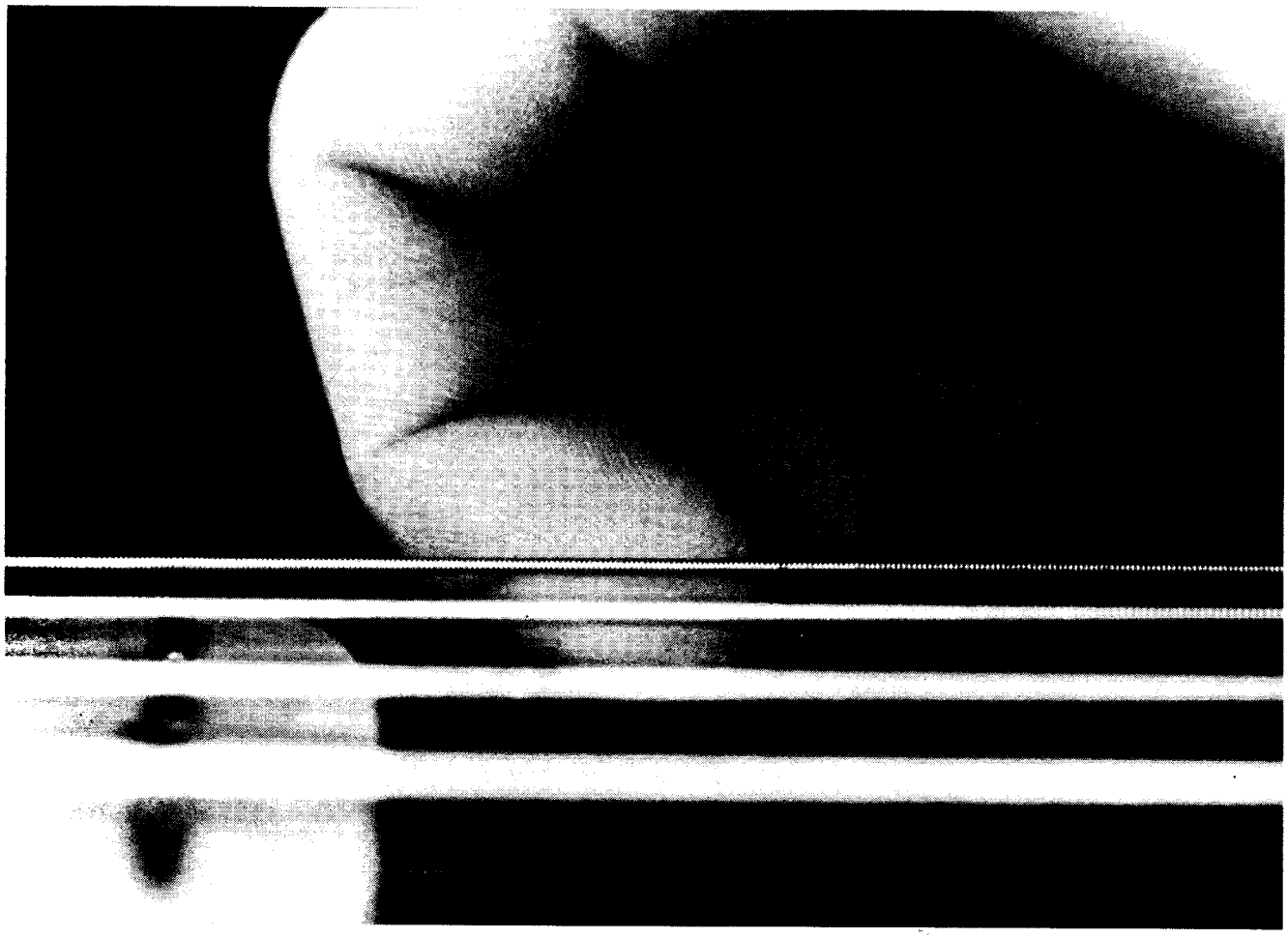
The technique / Part 2

Now you know how to employ the thumb. But there's a lot more to come yet.

The "pop and slap" technique

The four fingers that you haven't used yet are bent inwards at the middle and the last joint. The thumb remains in its streched position.

The index or middle finger is only pushed far enough under the respective string for the tip of the finger to pull the string upwards through a short upward movement of the wrist.

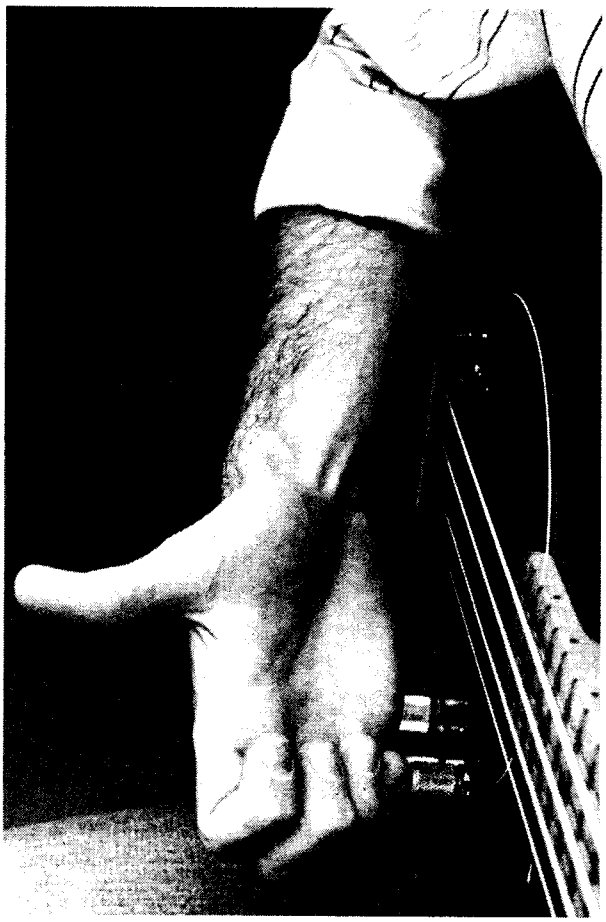


From a certain point on, the string must slip off the finger on its own, and it will then bang onto the frets.

Take care that you don't push your fingers too far under the string. Otherwise you'll find that you have to change the position of your finger joints before the string can jump back.

Let's have a look at the whole process once more. Remember that except for the thumb, all fingers are bent inwards in "pop and slap" playing. If you are only doing the slapping, you can leave them in a stretched position.

1



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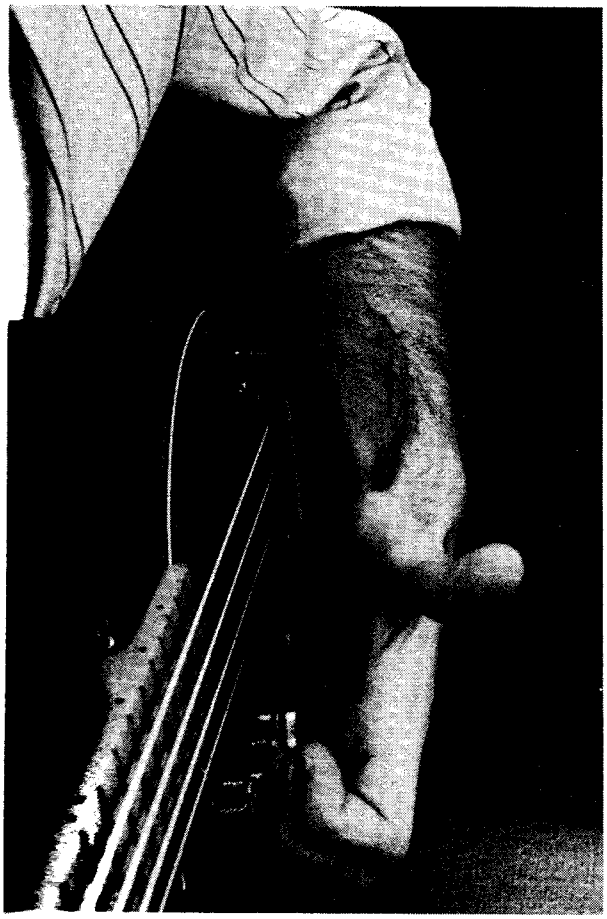

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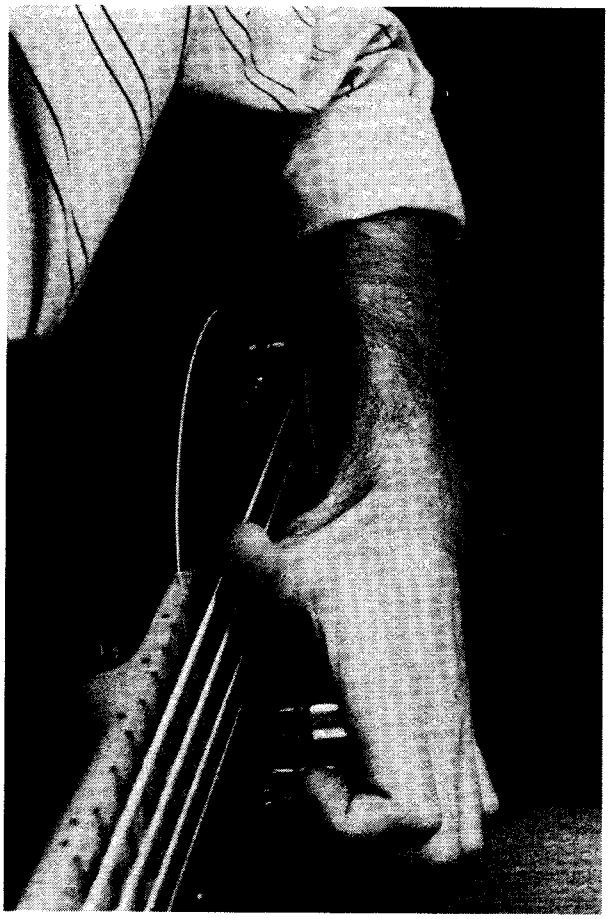
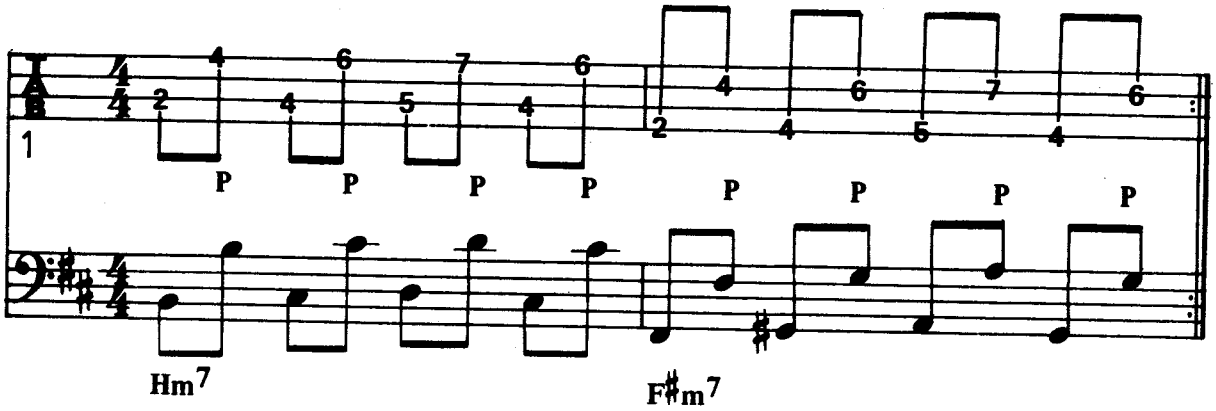


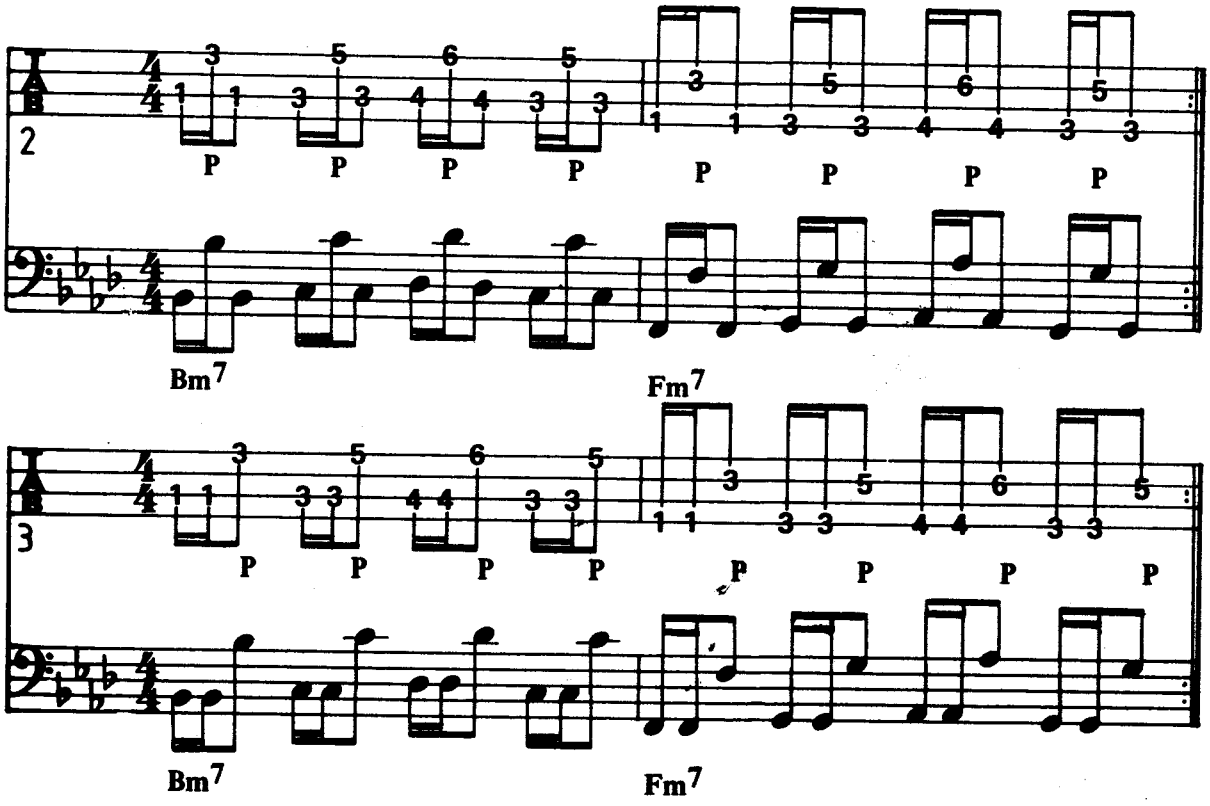
Easy Pop & Slap Licks

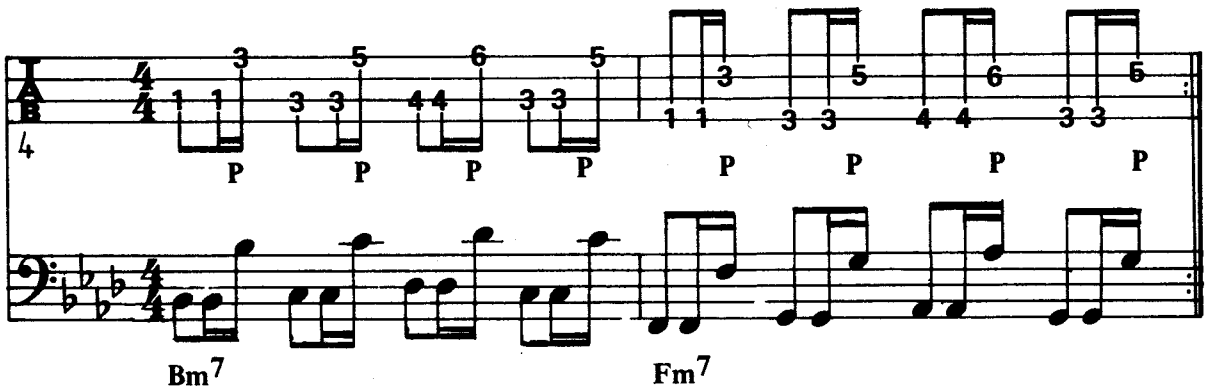
You've certainly heard the following bass line quite often. "Slap" the root and "pop" the octave.

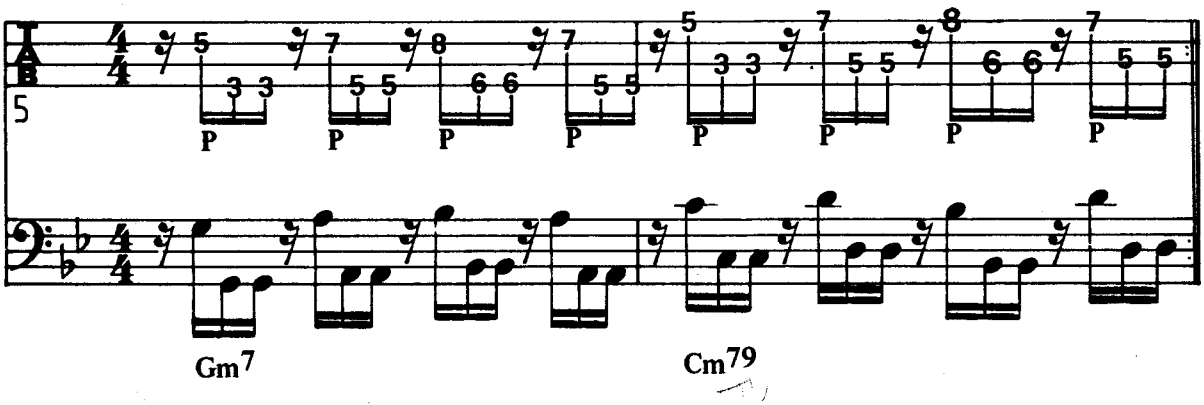
Take 9 (♩ = 100)

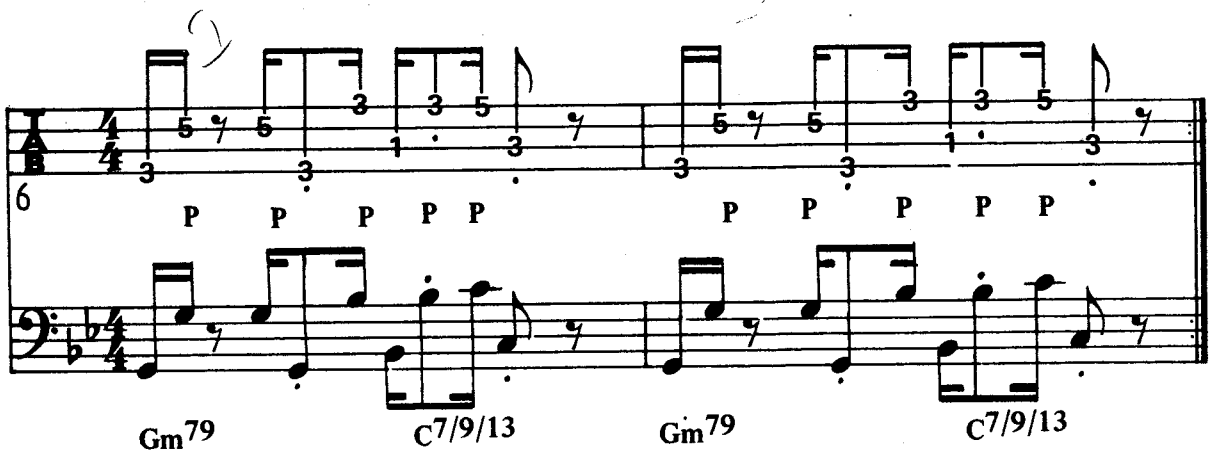


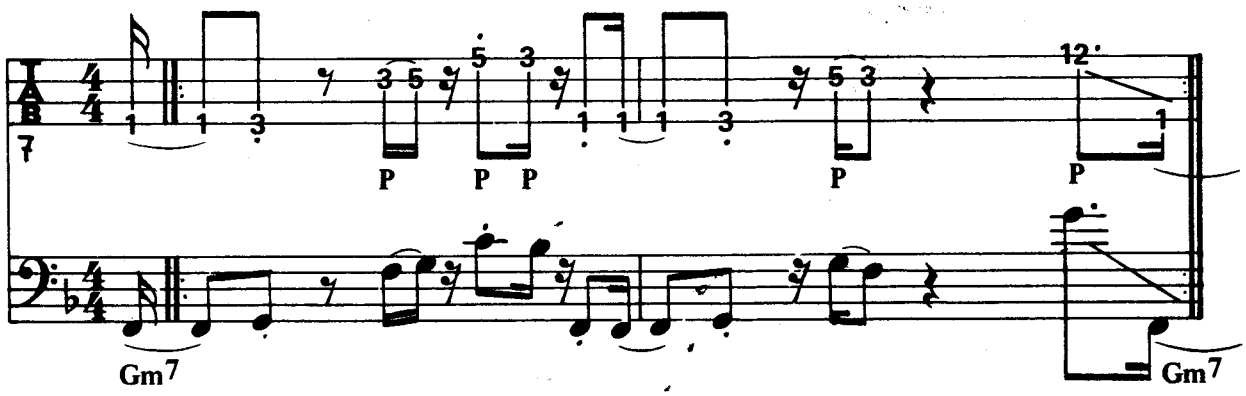
Now for some rhythmic variations. What was pointed out when we were dealing with slapping also holds for these exercises. Start slowly, and then you can start accelerating. And remember to maintain the right timing.




4
P P P P P P P P
Bm7
Fm7


5
P P P P P P P P
Gm7
Cm79


6
P P P P P P P P P P
Gm79
C7/9/13
Gm79
C7/9/13


7
P P P P P
12
Gm7
Gm7

The Strings

Basically there are three different types:

1. The flatwound strings. . .

. . . are best suited to reproduce the authentic sound of the fifties and early sixties (provided you put them on a Precision or Jazz Bass). Noise coused by shifting around from note to note is hardly perceptible because a flat wire has been wound around the core of the string. This also makes it resistant to any exterior influence (dirt, sweat, etc.). However, although these strings have a long lifespan, they are not very popular as the modern sounds and playing techniques cannot be realized on them.

2. The roundwound strings. . .

. . . are nowadays used by 95 percent of all bassists, and they are sold in different thicknesses. The choice of thickness depends on the respective style of music. I would recommend the heavy'n'hard rock lads to use the 045-105 thicknesses (G to E string). They're best for producing bass sounds with real pressure.

The thin strings have gone down well with the funk bassists (030-090 or 035-095). You can pull them better, and they are more pleasant to hold.

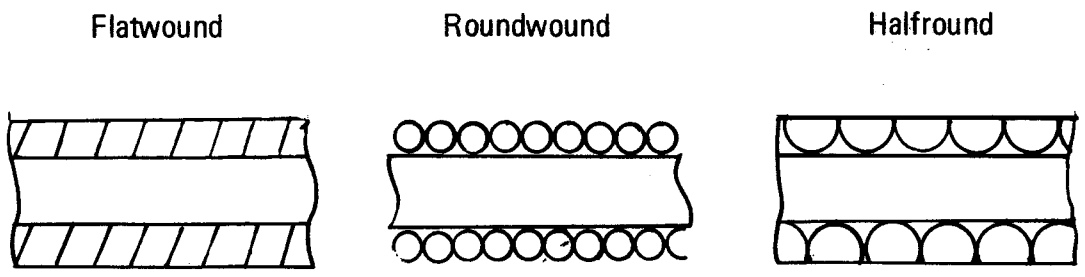
But be careful. You cant's use every thickness for all bass guitars. If you have made up your mind to use thin, flexible strings, then it might well be advisable to equip the bass with a pre-amp in order to compensate the lack in mass of the strings with active electronics. Passive instruments should be fitted with strings of at least 040-100 (this would be the golden rule).

Unfortunately, all roundwound strings are also reputed to be "fretkillers". The outer coil tends to eat its way into the metal of the frets like a rasp. Deep grooves soon appear in the fingerboards of the fretless basses. But then, one has to be prepared to go to great lengths for the sake of art. . .

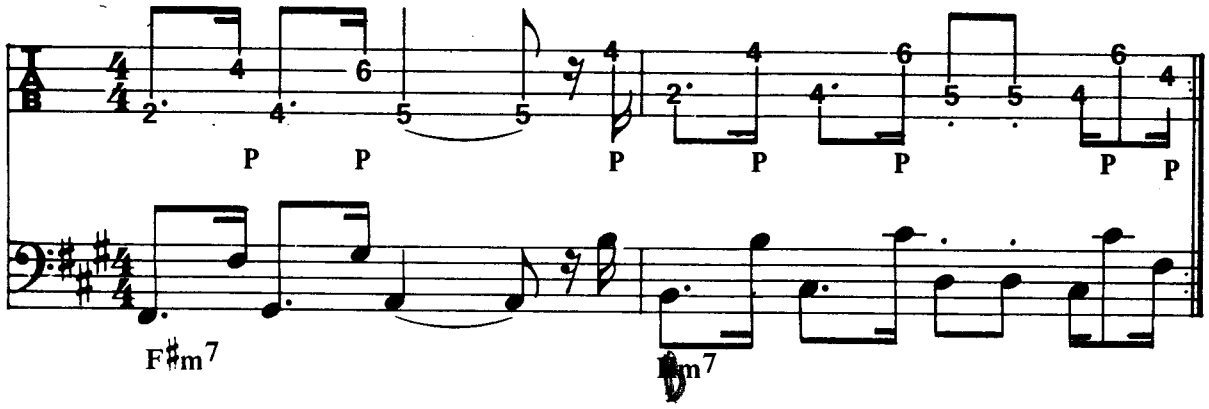
As the name implies, roundwounds are made by winding a round wire around the core of the string. For this reason, they are rather more susceptible to dirt and ought to be rubbed down with a dry cloth after playing.

3. The halfrounds. . .

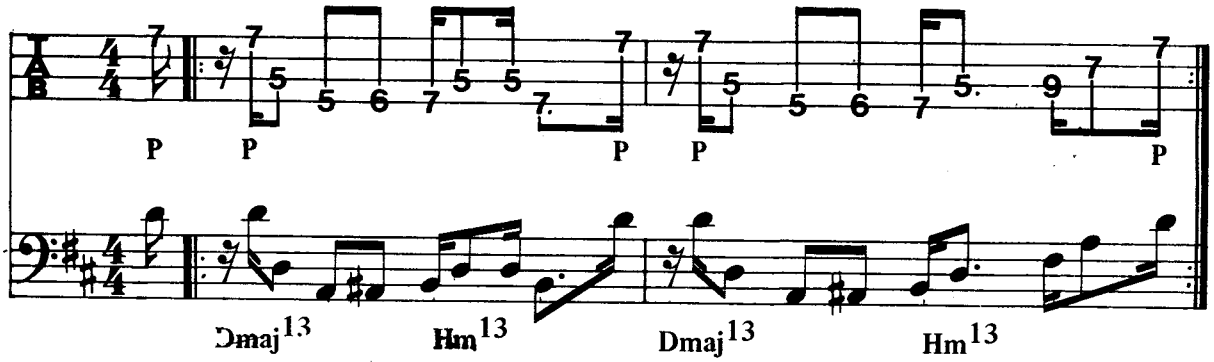
. . . are an attempt to develop strings that sound "wiry", but whose surface prevents the frets and figerboard (and tender fingers) from being exposed to too much wear and tear. Manufacturers of strings have discovered that the outer coil of a roundwound can be ground in a manner that makes it feel smooth but also enables it to produce a sound that is only a fraction different from the popular wiry sound. These strings are offered as quarterrounds, brite flats, or simply as halfrounds. Although they are somewhat more expensive than the roundwounds, on account of additional operations in the production process, the investment is bound to pay since the frets, the fingerboard and the halfrounds will last longer.



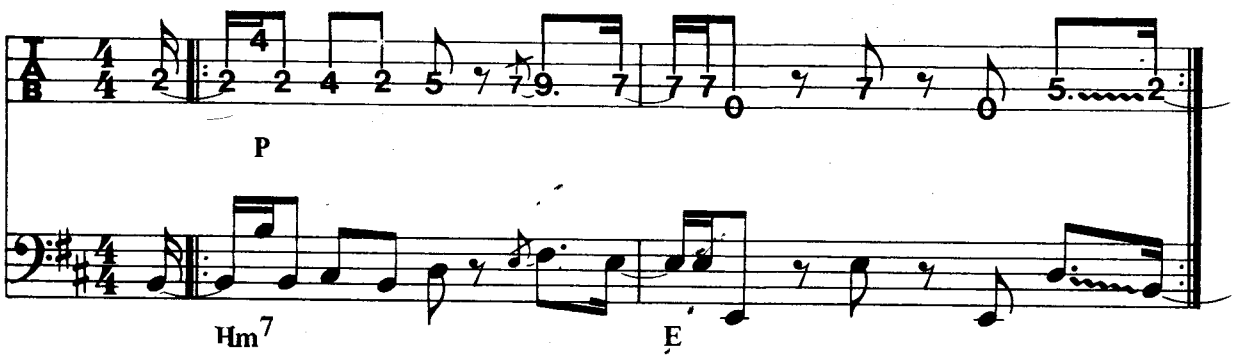
Take 10 (♩ = 96)



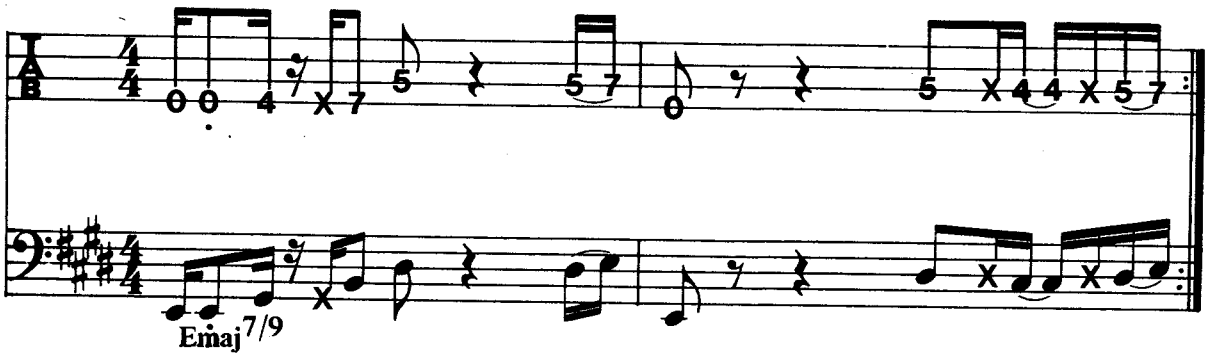
Take 11 (♩ = 100)



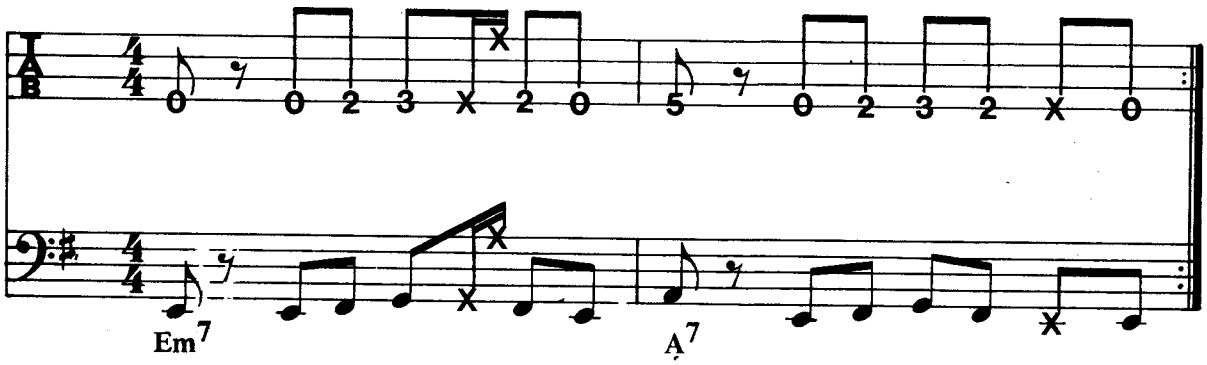
Take 12 (♩ = 105)



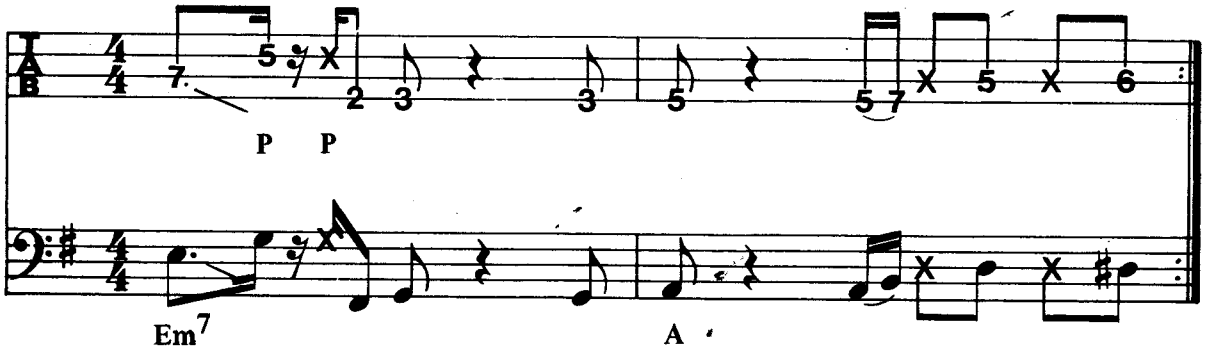
Take 13 (♩ = 113)



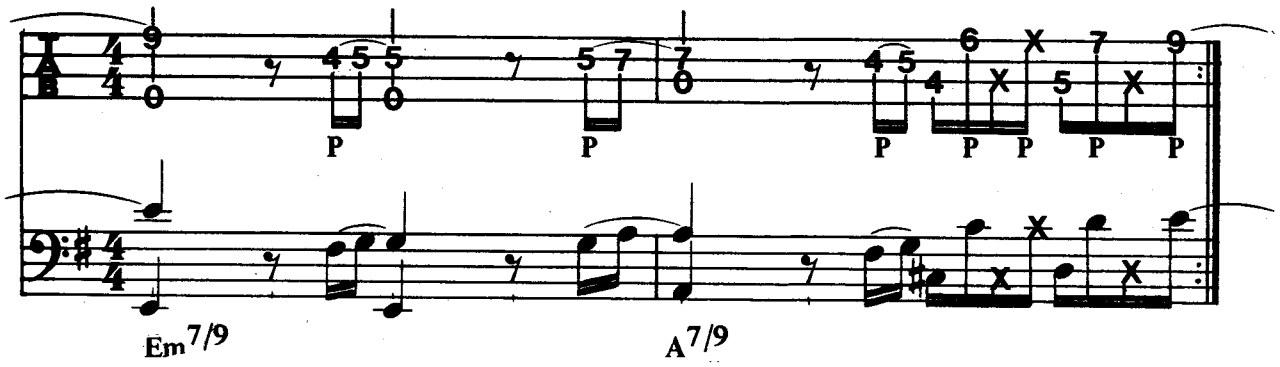
Take 14 (♩ = 126)



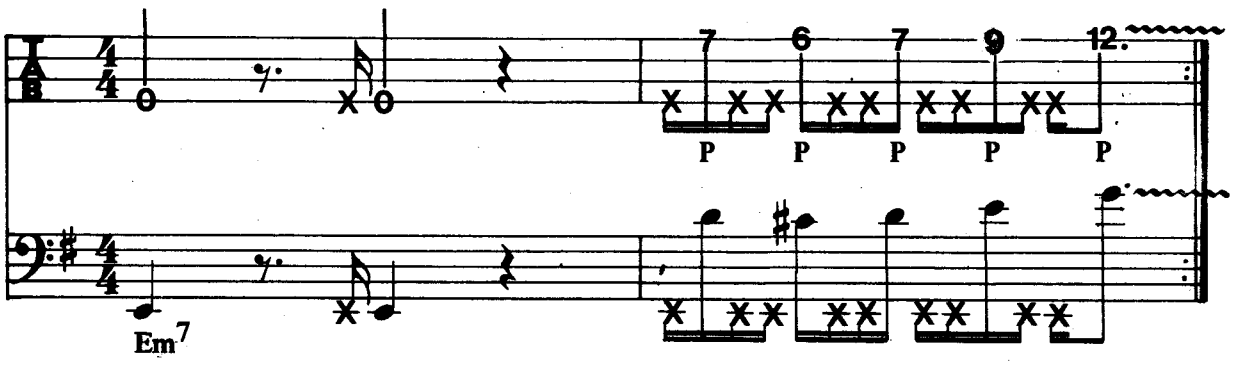
Take 15 (♩ = 108)



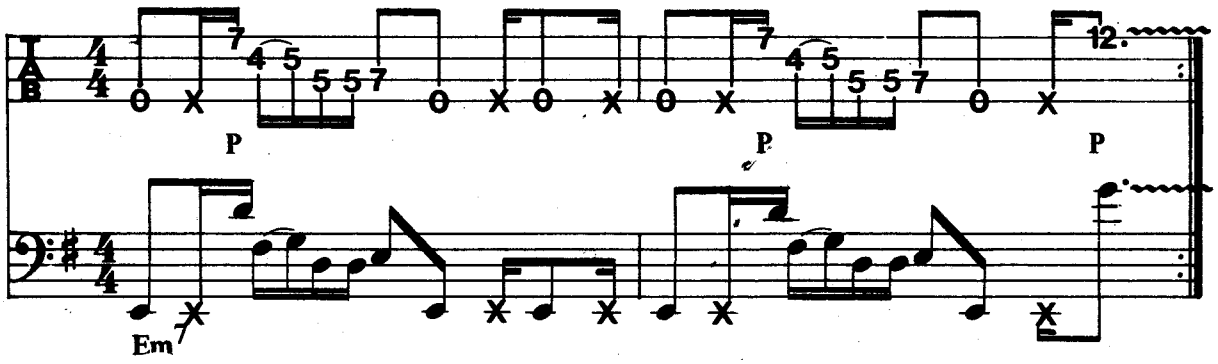
Take 16 (♩ = 103)



Take 17 (♩ = 98)



Take 18 (♩ = 108)



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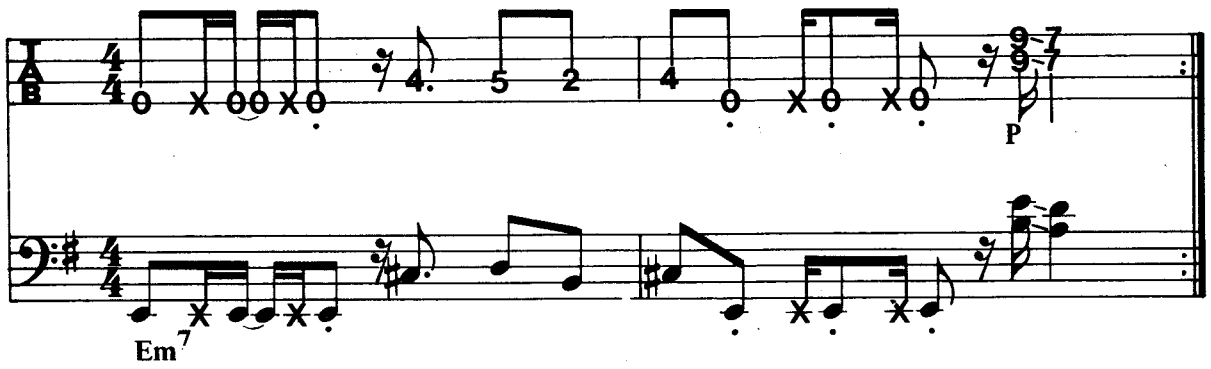
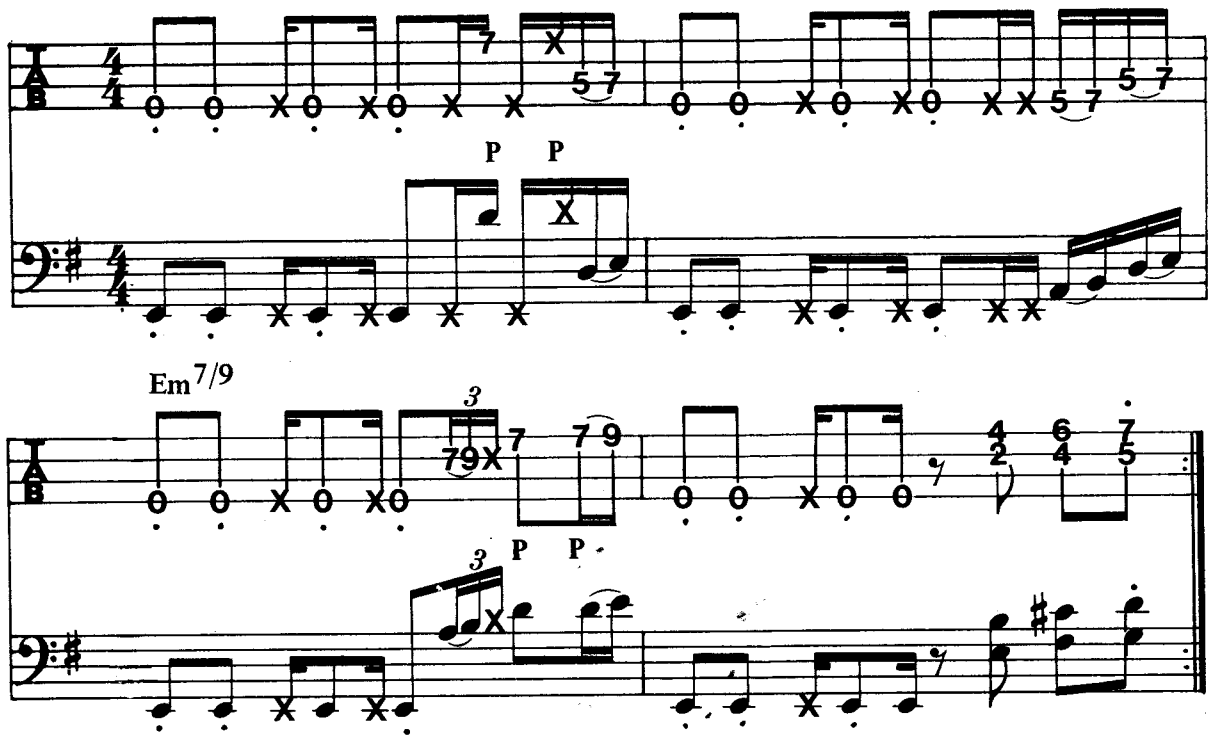


The following "double stops" are struck by the index and/or middle finger.

Take 20 (♩ = 100)



The Electronics

The pick-ups consist of magnets that are mounted in a coil frame around which copper wire has been wound. The sound is conditioned by the substance the magnet is made of, the number of coils and the position of the pick-up under the strings. For instance, it is not recommendable to mount the pick-up directly below the neck, for in that position it will only pick up the large oscillations of the strings, thus producing a bassy but somewhat blurred, muffled sound. Another thing is that in this position, the pick-up will tend to interfere immensely with pop-and-slap playing.

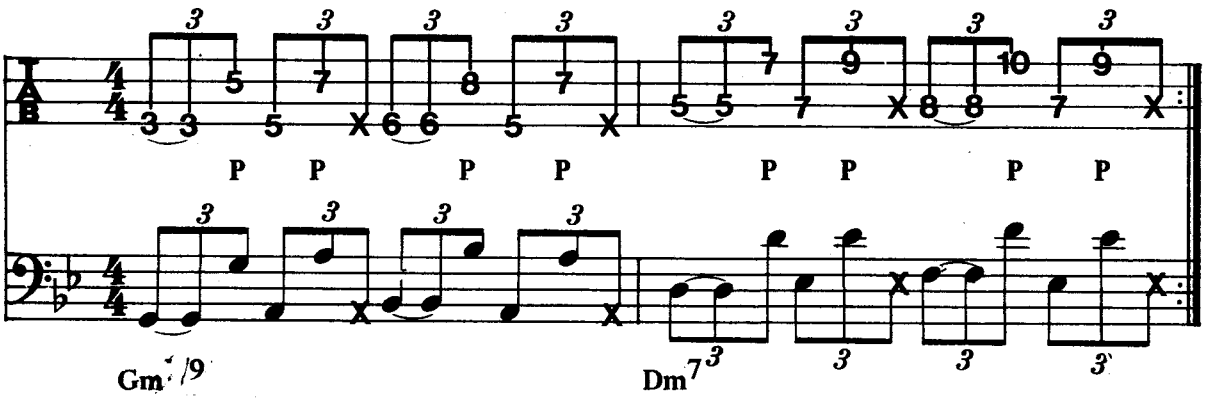
In the "precision" position (roughly in the middle of the corpus), the pick-up produces a powerful, rounded-off sound with a reasonable share of trebles. It is on account of this sound that the Fender Precision bass has become the world's best-selling bass. With an additional pick-up next to the bridge you can make use of the whole frequency spectrum of the instrument.

Many bassists swear by "active" sound adjustment. "Active" means that the pick-up or bass has a built-in pre-amp that is powered by a nine-volt battery that is also built-in. External power supply is also used sometimes, but you will usually only encounter it among instruments of the luxury range. The pre-amp serves the purpose of amplifying the signal directly on the bass itself. You can also set respective frequencies without having to turn a potentiometer knob on the amp. This type of pre-amp above all constitutes an improvement in sound compared with "passive" basses. The low output impedance reduces the loss in trebles caused by the long lead, which in turn makes the sound more open.

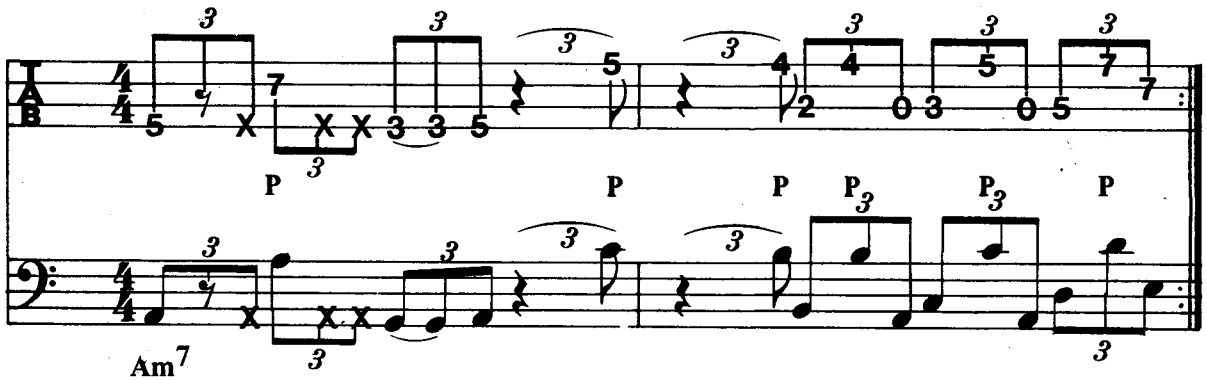
In a nutshell, the bass is more powerful, has more trebles and basses, and in terms of sound differentiation it is far more variable than its passive colleagues, which are only equipped with a potentimeter that reduces the trebles. It goes without saying that the pick-ups ought to be the highest quality if pre-amps are employed.

High-quality pick-ups that can be mounted on nearly all standard bass models are manufactured by Alembic, Seymor Duncan, Ken Smith, Bill Lawrence, EMG, Bartolini and Kent Armstrong.

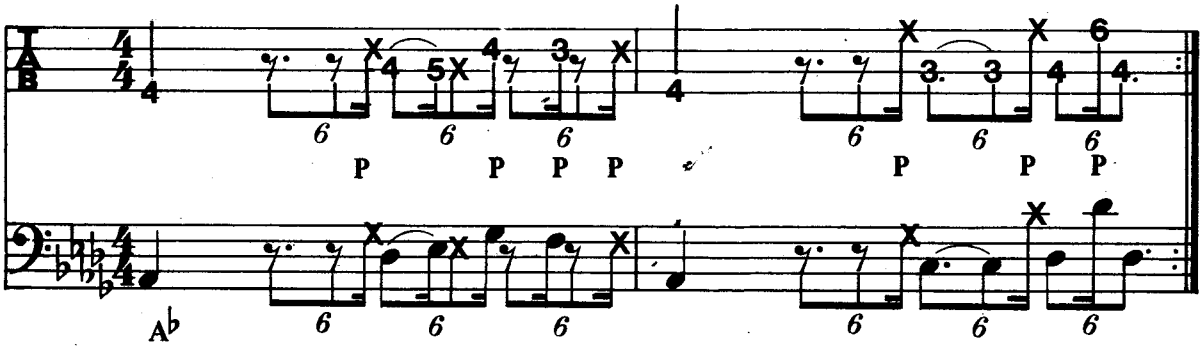
Take 21 (♩ = 116)



Take 22 (♩ = 125)

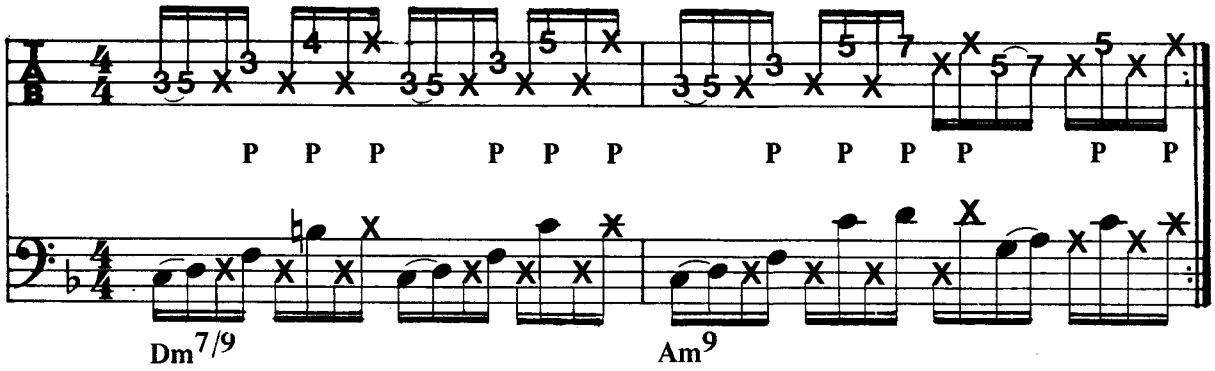


Take 23 (♩ = 85)



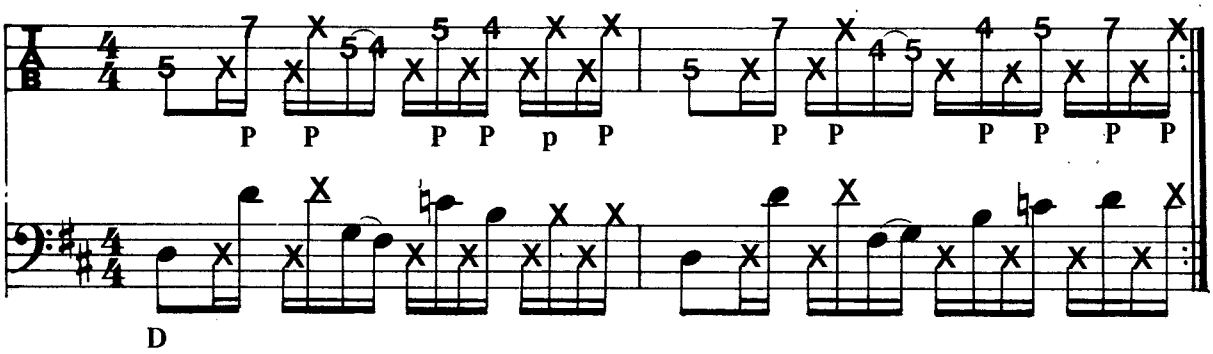
Take 24

(♩ = 111)

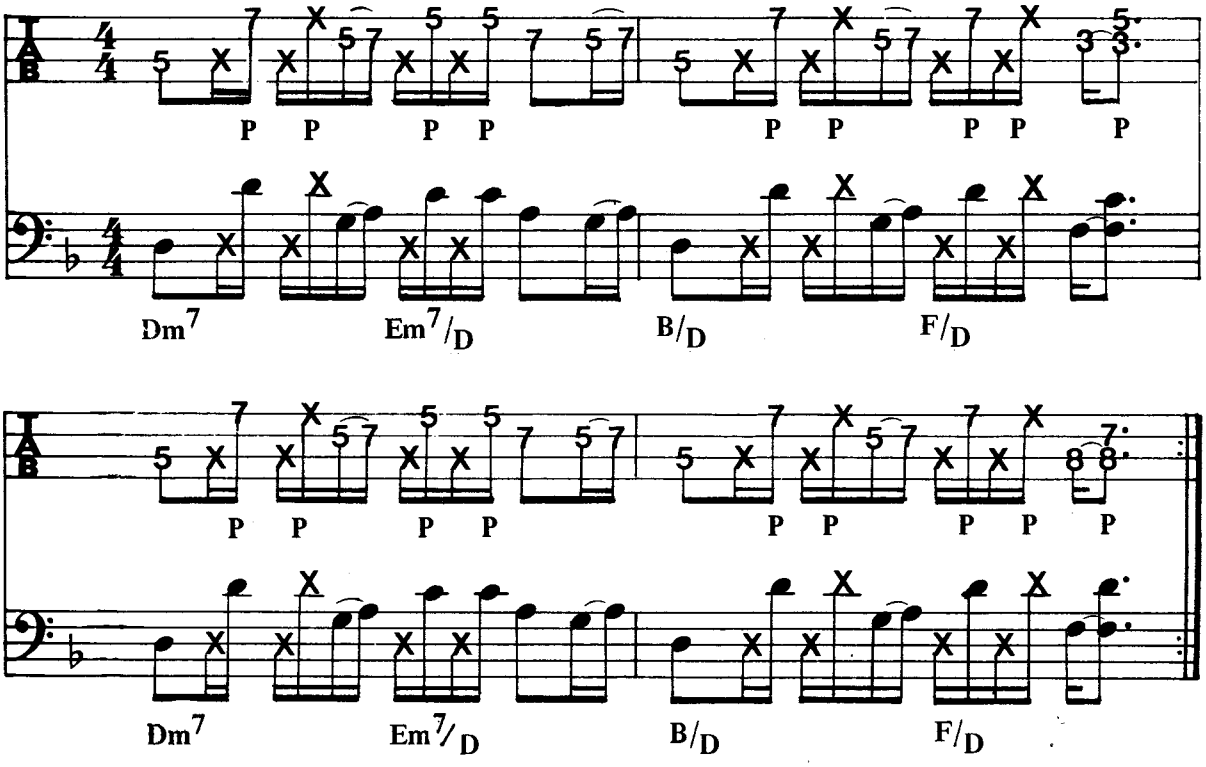


Take 25

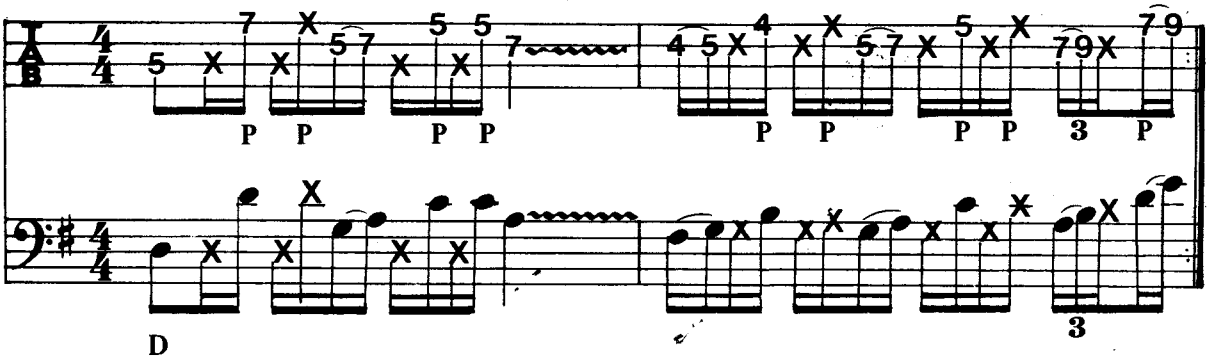
(♩ = 100)



Take 26 (♩ = 100)



Take 27 (♩ = 110)



The Bass-Amplifying System

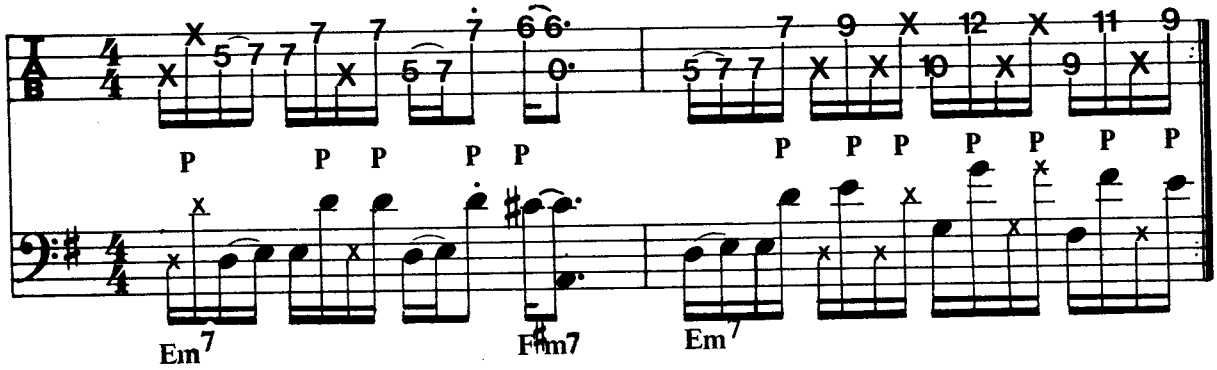
We bassists differ from guitar players in one very elementary aspect. Those are constantly looking for an optimum solo sound that they can achieve by overmodulating their amps. On the other hand, most of us will take great pains to avoid this distorted sound. So we prefer strong tube amps (e.g. Palmer, Boogie, Ampeg, etc.) that produce a warm basic sound without distorting the trebles. All that could possibly get a little distorted in this context is the face of the bassist when he becomes aware of what these amps actually cost. However, some of them can be obtained at a reasonable price, provided you are prepared to make do with a little less quality. In this respect, transistor amps present a viable option. Equipment operating with a "MOSFET" power amp reproduces the deep frequency basses more clearly than conventional amps do, since the impulses are processed more swiftly. Trace Elliot, AMP, Laney, Acoustic and Peavey manufacture good top parts.

The other option would be to use a separate pre-amp that triggers a stereo power amp. You call this method "bi-amping". The signal is split up by means of a diplexer, and basses and trebles are channelled to the respective loudspeaker systems. Incidentally, a diplexer is an integral part of nearly all better-quality pre-amps. Naturally, you also get sound differences depending on the type of "bi-amping" system that you are using. A Reußenzehn tube pre-amp with a Crown transistor power amp will sound different from a Yamaha transistor pre-amp coupled with a Craaft Power amp. And the combination of Trace Elliot pre- and power amps (purely transistor) bears little resemblance to a GT preamp linked up with a Mesa Boogie power amp (both operate as tube systems). The ear may make the final decision, but the wallet will be listening as well...

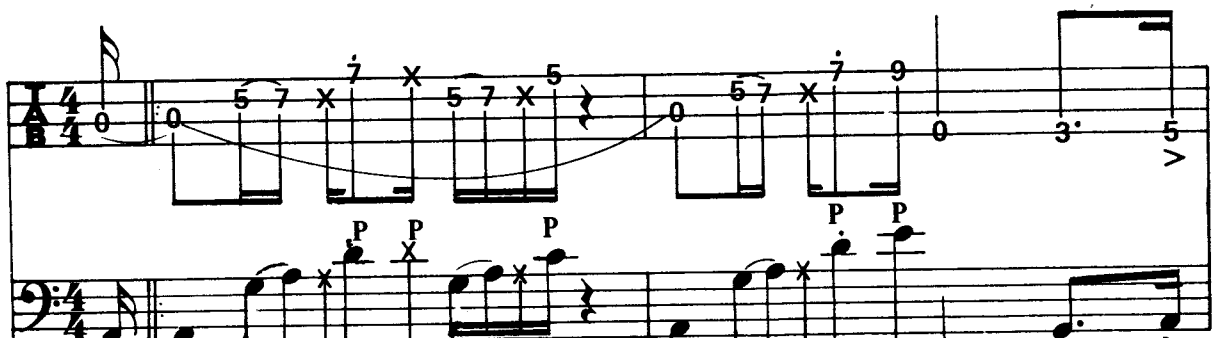
Just to finish off, it should to be pointed out that, although we've got a lovely bass with appropriate pick-ups, a pre-amp that can bend all frequencies into any desired direction, and a power amp that has no mean performance (it should be at least 200 watts sinusoidal performance), we still can't hear a sound, because we haven't sorted out the problem of choosing the right loudspeaker system yet. Often, and rather unfortunately, one doesn't become aware of the profound influence that a box also has on the sound before the expensive Electrovoice loudspeakers have been mounted in home-made wooden boxes and the whole thing just doesn't sound right. It's fair enough to have a go at joinery yourself. But the point is that loudspeakers are always constructed for a specific box volume, and this simply must be taken into account.

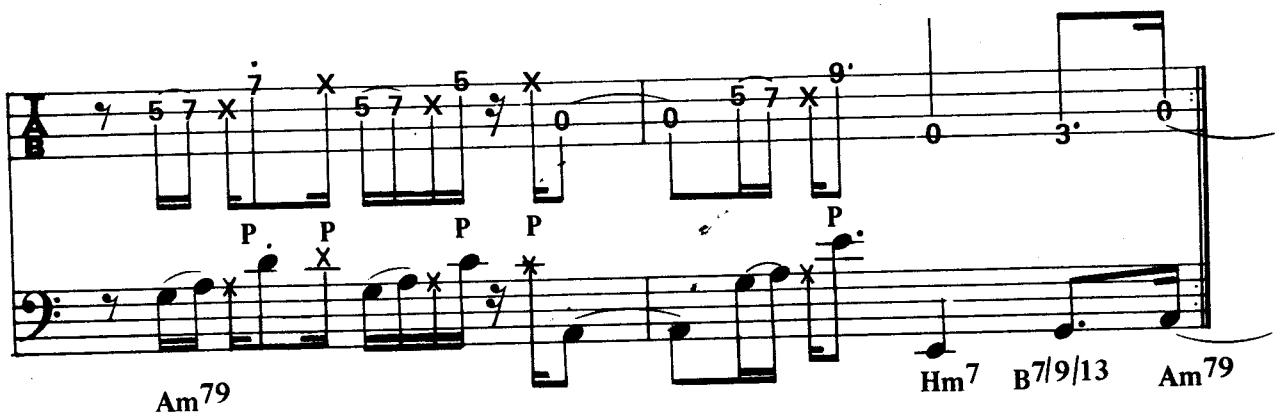
As for the loudspeaker itself, there have been some exciting new developments during the last few years. Many bassists have noticed that 15" speakers react too slowly to quick strokes of the thumb. The loudspeakers of several 10" speakers are capable of reproducing extreme peaks in dynamics faster and more swiftly, and the total surface of eight 10" speakers create enough bass pressure without the disturbing hooting effect cropping up that can often be heard when 15" loudspeakers are used. But a set-up with 4x10" speakers in conjunction with a 1x15" box will produce a super sound for people who don't trust small loudspeakers because they are afraid that the deep bass sound will be underrepresented. For all those that don't want to lug two boxes around there are two-way compact boxes that incorporate systems of different sizes that work independently. Electrovoice loudspeakers have set the tone during the last few years. However, the new Fane speakers from England have also become very interesting since they reproduce a good sound and are more reasonable in terms of prices.

Take 28 (♩ = 108)

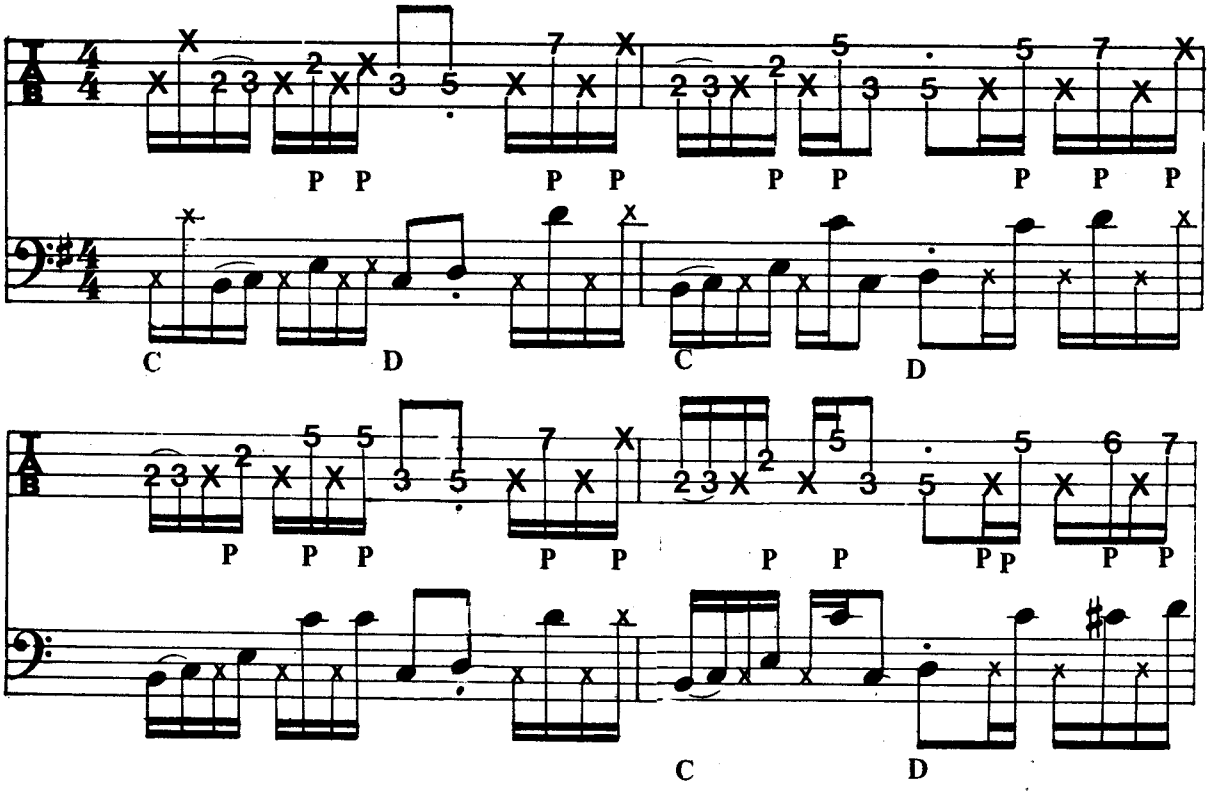


Take 29 (♩ = 108)





Take 30 (♩ = 109)



Key to symbols

1.

If notes of different pitches are linked by a slur mark, then you call this a "hammer-on" or a "pull-off". The notes that follow the first one are produced through beating the finger on the string or pulling it off the string, and they are sustained according to their respective note value.

2.

If notes of a different pitch are connected by a straight line, the second note is produced through sliding the finger up or down the string. The first note is struck, and the hand holding down the note slides up or down the fingerboard until it arrives at the respective second note.

3.

If notes are linked by a wavy slur mark, then the pitch is only changed through bending the string.

4.

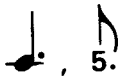
Here you are supposed to vibrate the note.

5.

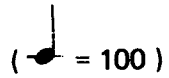
This symbol implies a percussion effect, i.e. a note value without a particular pitch. It can be accomplished through just laying the finger on the string, without pressing it. The string is then popped or slapped.

6.

This note is "popped". The same holds for the number above it (in the tab system).

7. 

The dot after a note or a number extends its rhythmic value by one half.

8. 

This symbol indicates the tempo at which the piece should be played (100 quarter-beats per minute).

9.

The dot below or above a note (number) implies that it should be played as briefly as possible, irrespective of its rhythm value (staccato).

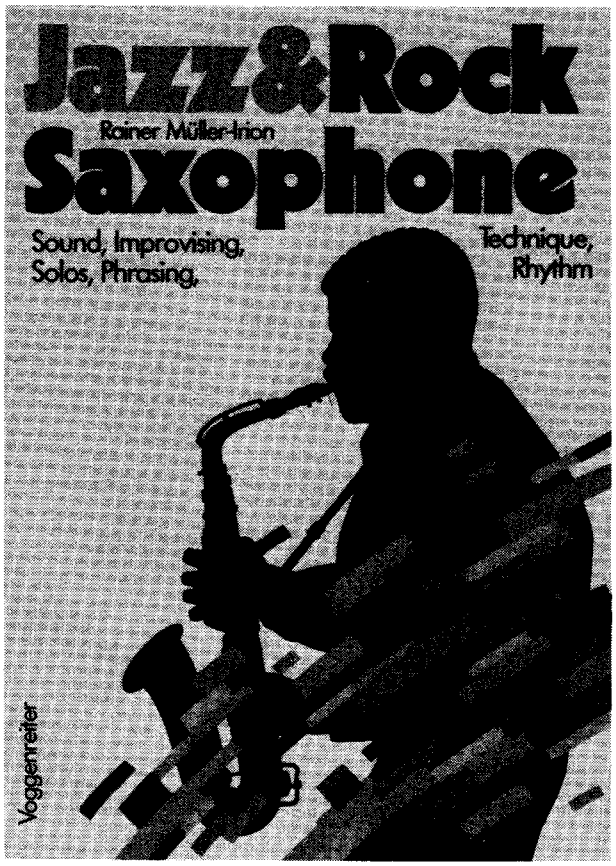
Thanks to:

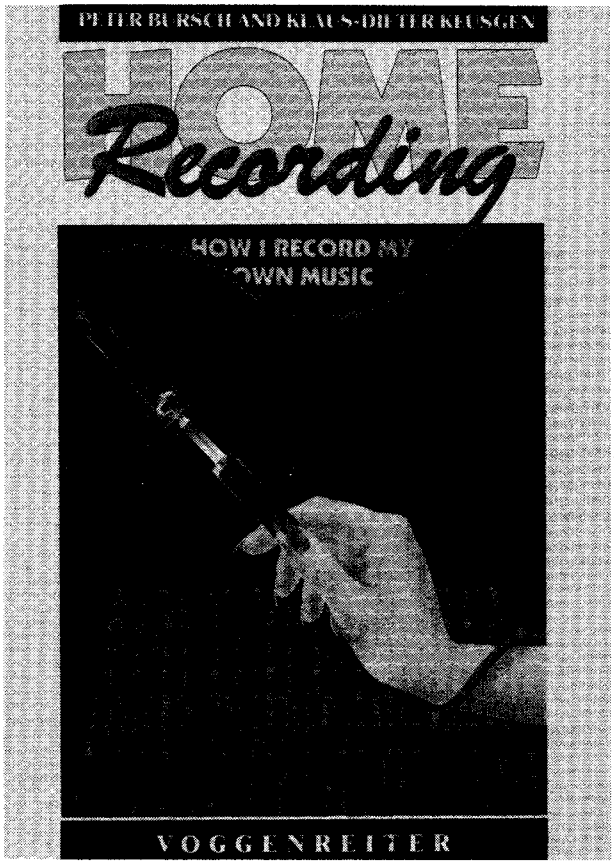
Kai Gottlob
Gerd Ouwens
Joachim Mies and
Bert „Mr. Bassman" Gerecht

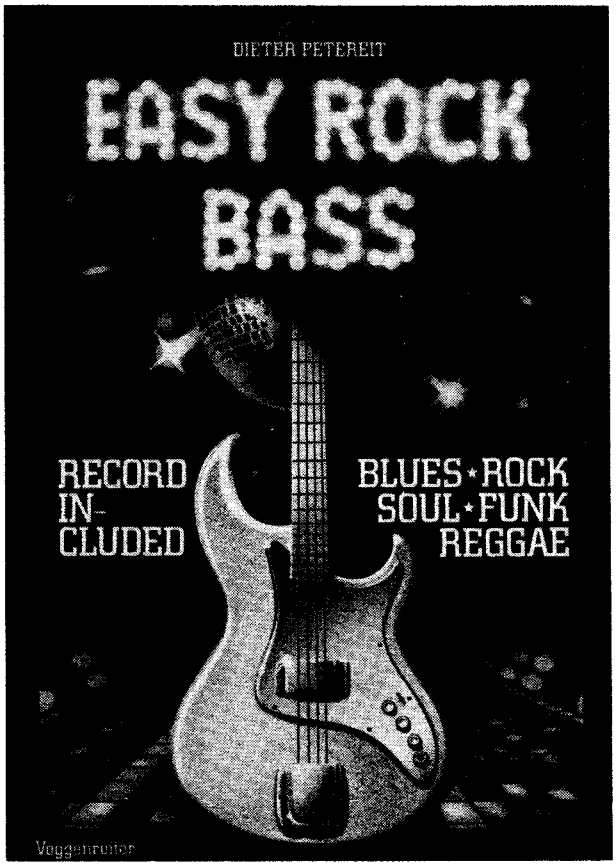
Competitors...

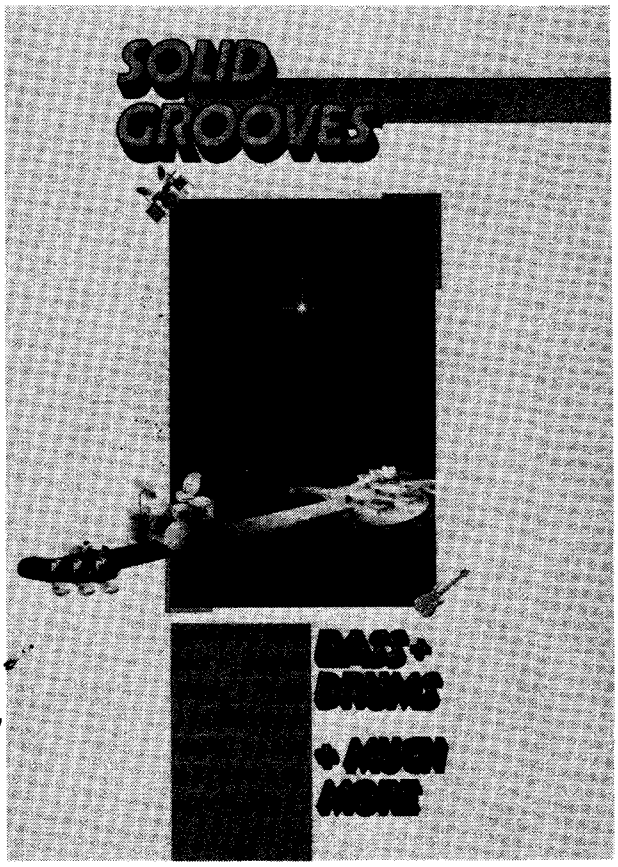
...are popping and slapping away all over the world.
However, the following list of well-known bassplayers can't be complete. It's only my own „Top 20".

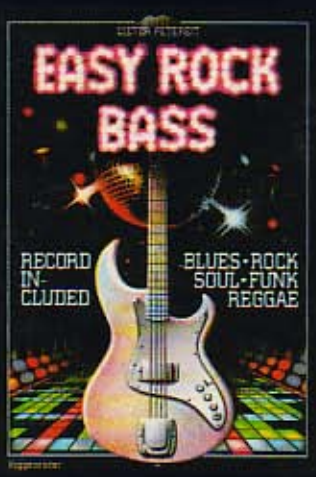
Stanley Clarke – Solo, Return to Forever
Nathan East – Al Jarreau, Eric Clapton, Phil Collins
Bernhard Edwards – Chic, Rod Stewart
Jimmy Haslip – Gino Vanelli, Chaka Khan
Jonas Hellborg – Solo, John McLaughlin
Randy Jackson – Michael Walden, Aretha Franklin, Journey
Louis Johnson – Brothers Johnson, Michael Jackson, Herbie Hancock
Darryl Jones – Sting, Miles Davis
Mark King – Level 42
Abraham Laboriel – Lionel Ritchie, Lee Ritenour
Tony Levin – Peter Gabriel, King Crimson
Cass Lewis – Terence Trent d'Arby
Chucho Merchan – Eurythmics, Pete Townshend, Working Week
Marcus Miller – Miles Davis, Scritti Politti, Bryan Ferry
Pino Palladino – Paul Young, Go West, Joan Armatrading
Jaco Pastorius – Solo, Weather Report
John Patitucci – Chick Corea
Robbie Shakespeare – Sly & Robbie, Grace Jones, Joe Cocker
T. M. Stevens – James Brown, Pretenders
Tom „T-Bone" Wolk – Hall & Oates

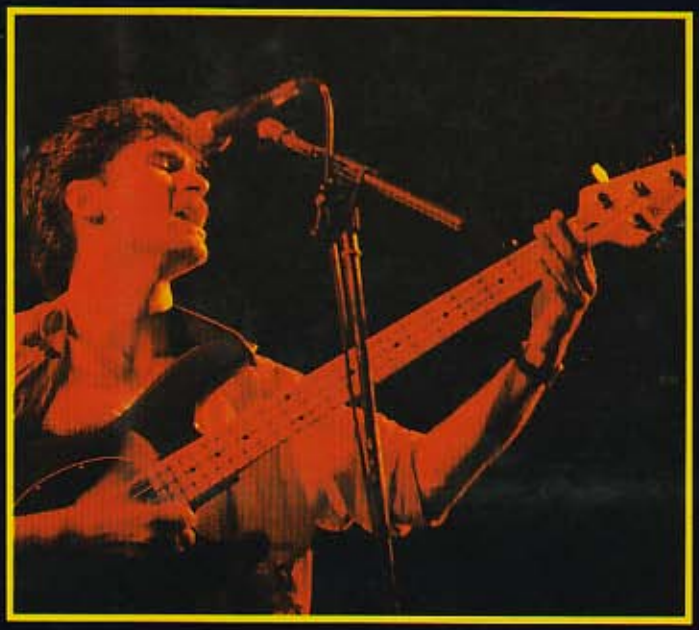

Jazz&Rock
Saxophone
Rainer Müller-Irion
Sound, Improvising,
Solos, Phrasing,
Technique,
Rhythm
Voggenreiter


PETER BURSCH AND KLAUS-DIETER KEUSGEN
HOME
Recording
HOW I RECORD MY
OWN MUSIC
VOGGENREITER


DIETER PETEREIT
EASY ROCK
BASS
RECORD
IN-
CLUDED
BLUES · ROCK
SOUL · FUNK
REGGAE
Voggenreiter


SOLID
GROOVES
BASS +
DRUMS
+ MUCH
MORE





Robert Lindmaier

Funky Fingers

You've taken the first step.
You're no longer a beginner.
But you've never learnt enough.
This book will give you some instructions and advice that you really need to attain a degree of proficiency in bass-playing.
We've certainly got some work ahead of us…